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TWENTY SHORT PLAYS
ON A
ROYALTY HOLIDAY

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TWENTY SHORT PLAYS ON A ROYALTY HOLIDAY

(1937 to 1940)

*These plays, never before published, are offered
royalty-free to amateurs until January, 1940*

EDITED BY

MARGARET MAYORGA

Author of

"A Short History of the American Drama"



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALPHONSE BARE

SAMUEL FRENCH

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1937

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DEDICATED
TO ALL WHO PRODUCE PLAYS
JUST FOR FUN

PREFACE

As the dedication suggests, this volume of short plays is shamefully lacking in any sober purpose. I have chosen these twenty plays from among many hundreds simply because I think amateurs will enjoy producing them.

It was not many decades ago that young persons with histrionic inclinations — and I confess that I was one — studied elocution, and looked forward to each yearly catalog of Samuel French for its new monologues, which were memorized and recited principally for the satisfaction of doting families, and then incidentally for the pastime of polite friends.

It was only the more ambitious in those Delsartean days who dared attempt anything in the nature of a dramatization or a little theatre experiment. Surely the day such as that August 13, 1908, when the undertaker's daughter who lived on "the corner" suggested to me that our crowd get together to produce *Bluebeard* should be recorded as a symbolic step in the history of community plays everywhere. There has not been, even on the barnyard circuits, a theatre auditorium more fitting and natural to the play presented than was her father's mortuary to the tragedy of blood; nor a more realistic setting than the one which caused me to cry, "Sister Annie, sister Annie, do you see anyone coming?" as I peered from my prison transom at the top of the stepladdered tower, out over the mortuary washroom.

Although today's Bluebeards have developed modernistic complexes, and the ambitious young actors who portray them do so with the hope that there is a screen scout somewhere in the audience, the fun of giving plays is still good, and more prevalent than ever.

Formal playwriting contests in five states, frequent

PREFACE

national play-competitions, playwriting courses in more than two hundred colleges and universities are all working together to foster a national dramatic art; and regular stage productions in almost one thousand colleges and an untold number of high schools offer experience and audiences to test the dramatic fare. Nor may the countless halls in towns and hamlets where neighbors once smiled upon local renditions of "The Killing of Dan McGrew" go unrecorded, for these are now sheltering community experiments in play-making that give joy to great numbers of participants, even when the plays produced seldom achieve national prominence.

Often the greatest enjoyment is obtained from some dramatic production which is not taken over-seriously, and in which an unforeseen slip in a stage prop may be a signal for general good humor rather than jittery bewilderment. There are occasions when an informal reading of a play, perhaps on a center stage without curtains or properties of any kind, is more desirable than a formal staging. Progressive school and community groups are even learning the value of spontaneous expression.

In order that the fun of some informal occasion may not be lost over the necessity always to charge admission to pay for royalty privileges, these plays are offered to amateurs royalty-free until January 1, 1940, provided that one copy of the play, in separate form, is purchased for each member of the cast. The separate editions satisfy the copyright requirements which are explained in detail on page iv.

I hope the twenty selections will encourage the play spirit, and by so doing bring pleasure and satisfaction to the authors who have generously agreed to publication of their works under the "royalty holiday" plan.

MARGARET MAYORGA

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TERMS OF PRODUCTION

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Each of the plays in this volume is published separately at 35 cents per copy. The Separate Editions contain complete stage plans, character descriptions, and in some cases, musical scores.

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A DARKSOME FURRINER

A Comedy

By

WELDON STONE

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CAST

GRANDPA SKAGGS, called Pappy, patriarch of Hemmed-in-Holler. Eighty years old. Alert and spry when he wants to be. No teeth. Has a fine, windy mane of white hair and a splendid beard that ripples when he talks. Sniffs a pinch of snuff before making important decisions. Carries, mainly for the feel of it, a good hickory walking-stick.

GRANDPA COLLINS, called Young Pappy, first cousin of Grandpa Skaggs. Five years younger. No teeth. Carries snuff in lower lip except when eating or sleeping. Uses a knotty and gnarled cedar walking-stick.

BLAND HILL, about forty-five, oldest son of Grandpa Skaggs' oldest daughter. Coarse rumpled black hair with a graying cowlick. Mustache and ten-day beard; deep scar high on left cheek. Several teeth prominently missing. Chews homegrown tobacco.

DOW HUGGINS, great-nephew of Grandpa Skaggs. Clean-shaven. Smokes a pipe.

GUY SKAGGS, the last of the Skaggses, great-grandson of Grandpa Skaggs. Tainted with outyonder learning: one year in the high school at Jasper. Has seen three movies and heard a radio. Once drove a T-model Ford completely around the courthouse at Jasper. Said to be "as slick as a granny-hatchet." Smokes hand-rolled cigarettes.

(All these men have large ears standing out alertly from forward-thrusting heads that angle sharply down from good brows to hard chins. Their noses are straight and long and thinly fleshed; their mouths are wide, lips thin and taut. Grandpa and Guy Skaggs have drooping left eyelids under downdrawn brows. This is the indisputable "mark of the Skaggses.")

RAFFAELE CESARANO, called Ralph, a darksome furriner, about forty-five. Came to the United States in 1920 and for the past ten years has sold good food and good wine in his own basement restaurant, the Savoia, at 88 Mulberry Street. He loves music and happy people and the hills above Florence where his father kept a vineyard before the war.

ANGELA CESARANO, his daughter, about twenty. Beautiful but intelligent. Her father's restaurant was her finishing school. It taught her how to handle men with poise and good humor.

The place is Hemmed-in-Holler, Newton County, Arkansas.
The time is early June, 1936.

A DARKSOME FURRINER

The scene is a one-room log cabin used by the people of the Holler as a church, a school, and a council room.

There is a stone fireplace in the rear wall with a door to the left of it. In each sidewall there is a small window with a deerskin hanging over it. Under the left window is a strong home-made table with an old globe and a dictionary on it. Before this table is a bench hewn out of white oak and another like it across stage. Back of this second bench is a home-made blackboard standing on three hickory legs. On the blackboard may be seen letters of the alphabet from A to M and all the numbers in order. Above the fireplace is a large map of the United States showing Indian Territory. There is a lantern on the mantel and a small fire in the fireplace. There is a home-made rawhide bottom chair at each side of the hearth.

When the curtain rises, Grandpa Skaggs is in the chair to the right, Grandpa Collins in the other. They are both leaning forward and looking into the fire, their hands resting on their sticks and their chins on their hands. For a full minute, neither moves; then Grandpa Collins lifts his head and leans toward the door, listening. Then he gets up slowly and, using his stick, walks over to the door, lifts the latch, and swings the door open. Grandpa Skaggs lifts his head and looks at him. Grandpa Collins stands a moment peering out into the darkness. Then he closes the door and returns to his chair. Grandpa Skaggs lowers his chin to rest upon his hands again. Grandpa Collins takes out his snuff-box and, throwing his head far back, pulls out his lower lip by the hair and fills it with snuff. He settles back in his chair with his stick between his knees supporting his hands. After a moment he leans forward on his stick and spits into the fireplace.

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit's been a right smart while. Back in '88, the last un.

[Grandpa Skaggs lifts his head slowly, leans back and puts his right hand into a pocket of his coat under his beard. He brings out a snuff-box, opens it, and sniffs a pinch up his nostrils. He sneezes once, wipes his nose with his beard, and replaces the snuff-box.]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. '89, I recollect.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit was '88, ef ye call hit rightly to mind.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit was in the summer of the hail-storm an' thet was '89.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit was the summer afore the hail-storm. Pa set hit down in the Bible and I mind hit well. Come up a passel of finehaired folks adriving a span of mules and the women folks was dyked out in brought-on finery. Hit was the summer of '88.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit was a wagon all covered over, and hit was too big and heavy to git up into the Holler and they camped yon side the ridge. Pa took me along when he went to drive 'em back out yonder. We never had to shoot ary a one of 'em. Hit was in June of '89.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit was a big wagon and they was fancy folk. I seen 'em when they come up the trail and I seen 'em when they went down it. I was settin' in thet there big chinkypin tree an' when they was right under me, I squalled like a pant'er. Ain't seen hide nor hair of ary a furriner since, an' thet was back in June of '88.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Forty-seven year ago hit was, this month.

GRANDPA COLLINS *(after glancing sharply at Grandpa Skaggs and then pondering the problem)*. Forty-eight year ago, I mind.

GRANDPA SKAGGS *(quietly but very firmly)*. Hit was forty-seven year.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Forty-eight.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Forty-seven.

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA COLLINS. Forty . . .

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*striking the floor once with his stick*).
Seven.

GRANDPA COLLINS (*rising*). Eight.

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*rising and standing very straight so that he towers above Grandpa Collins*). SEVEN.

GRANDPA COLLINS (*slowly sinking back into his chair*).
Hit was a family of finehaired folks like these here on-comers now.

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*after settling himself back into his chair*). This here one thet Guy and Dow Huggins seen is a darksome furriner.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Finehaired as yore beard, I heerd say.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit's a darksome furriner.

[*The door opens and Raffaele Cesarano is urged into the room by Dow Huggins and Bland Hill, both carrying murderous-looking three-pronged fish gigs. Guy Skaggs comes in last, shuts the door, and then presses forward to stand by their captive. Guy is carrying a long single-barrel shotgun. Dow Huggins puts a lantern on the left end of the mantel and leans on his gig. Bland Hill stands to the left of the door leaning on his.*

GUY (*playing soldier*). We got' im, pappy.

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*standing and speaking to Ralph*). Set there.

[*He points to bench at left. Then he looks at Guy and Guy backs up to the table and leans against it, the shotgun between his legs. Grandpa Skaggs moves his chair to face Ralph squarely and Grandpa Collins does the same.*

GRANDPA COLLINS (*after staring hard at Ralph, speaks to Grandpa Skaggs*). I be dogged ef thet feller ain't gone an' dyed his hair.

[*Ralph passes a hand through his hair.*

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*looking at Ralph*). He's a natural-born darksome person.

GUY (*standing up from the table, speaking faster than the others*). They all air, pappy. They's a whole passel of

A DARKSOME FURRINER

younguns, an' they was acarryin' on so I told their Ma we didn't aim to hurt nobody, just wanted to git acquainted. They's a growed-up gal thet favors a gal I seen in the movin' pictures.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit was right to disalarm the women-folks.

[He looks levelly at Guy again and Guy retreats to the table.]

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit's a sight on this earth how they-all could git their hair dyed so sudden.

RALPH (*jumping up*). Ees nota dyed. Same lika dees . . .

[He stops and sits down when he meets Grandpa Skaggs' glance.]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Weuns don't want no furriners in Hemmed-in-Holler. Thet's whut weuns air aimin' to say to ye tonight. They ain't been a outyanderer into this Holler to settle here since back in '89.

GRANDPA COLLINS (*to Ralph, confidentially*). '88, hit was.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. An' we don't want nary one now. Youins kin git out tomorrow afore sundown an' the' won't no harm come to ye.

GRANDPA COLLINS (*emphatically*). Afore sundown. Weuns ain't agoin' to have no dyed-hair furriners in this Holler.

RALPH (*standing up and digging into his coat pocket for his citizenship papers*). Watsa mat'? I gotta da pape'. Cee-tizen. Seexa year I gotta da cee-tizen pape'. (*Takes papers over to Grandpa Skaggs.*) I geeva da vote for Roosevelt. Ees beega mistake. (*Sits down.*)

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*with the papers in his hands*). Whut-all air ye asayin'? Git the lantern.

[Guy obeys, leaning his gun against the table.]

GRANDPA COLLINS. Thet's Latin he's atalkin'.

GUY (*holding lantern for Grandpa Skaggs*). No hit ain't, young pappy. Hit's the way a man talked in thet

A DARKSOME FURRINER

movin' picture. He's jest atalkin' with a Boston accent.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Well, this ain't no movin' picture. Tell 'im to talk plain talkin'.

[Guy takes papers from Grandpa Skaggs and hands them to Grandpa Collins.]

RALPH (*standing*). Ees taka long time speaka da English, bot I speaka da Italiano, an' da Frencha playnty good. Parley-vous français?

[He looks around hopefully. Bland Hill, who has been leaning on his gig, stiffens; then, holding his gig like a rifle with bayonet ready, comes slowly forward and stops, facing Ralph. He drops the butt of his gig to the floor and stands at attention.]

BLAND HILL. Whut did you say?

RALPH (*eagerly*). Parley-vous français?

BLAND HILL (*slowly, laboriously*). Oui. Oui, oui.

RALPH (*happily*). Vraiment! C'est bon ça. Avez-vous habité en français?

BLAND HILL (*very slowly, recalling with difficulty*). La . . . War. (*Points to scar.*) Ma'm'selle . . . couchez . . . mangez.

RALPH. Ah, la guerre! Vous était un soldat Américain. Et moi, soldat Italienne.

BLAND HILL. Petit chouchou . . . cochon . . . pronto . . . (*Pause.*) I cain't recollect no more Frainch words.

RALPH (*grabbing his hand*). Thatsa fine. We forget da war, eesa bad. Speak American same like a ceetizen. American eesa besta lingo.

[Bland Hill returns to his place by the mantel and slumps.]

GRANDPA COLLINS (*looking up from the papers again*). He ain't no American. He's one o' these here New Yorkans.

[Guy looks over his shoulder at the papers.]

RALPH. No, no. New York ees justa place for work; Arkansas eesa place for live.

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA COLLINS (*handing the papers to Ralph*). Well, ye're plum bereft. This here is Hemmed-in-Holler. Arkansas is out yanner. (*Swings his stick in a half circle.*)

GUY. Whut young pappy's aimin' to say is thet Arkansas is all around about the Holler but the' ain't none of it *in* the Holler.

[*Grandpa Skaggs strikes the floor with his stick once, and Guy fades back and replaces the lantern on the mantel.*]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit's a right big state an' I reckon ye kin find a place to live in hit ef ye want to. But ye cain't live here in the Holler. Hit's settled.

RALPH. Watsa mat'? I spenda playnty mon' fo' deesa farm. I raisa da grape, maka da wine, justa live happy . . .

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Youins cain't live on thet land.

RALPH. Da beega law, da sheriff in Jasper, he sella da land, say eetsa O.K., nice-a farm.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Weuns never give 'im leave. Thet there land an' thet house on hit belongs to the Holler, an' the gover'mint cain't take it out of here nor sell hit to no furriner. Youins kin have till sundown tomorrer to git out.

GUY (*coming forward*). To-morrer's Sunday, pappy.

[*Grandpa Skaggs looks at him and Guy eases back onto the table and holds gun between his knees.*]

RALPH (*excited*). Da Sheriff eesa beega crook. Eet'sa beega racket. Sama like New York.

[*Grandpa Skaggs strikes the floor with his stick and rises. He takes half a step toward Ralph and stops. As he is about to speak, a knocking is heard at the door. Guy stands up; everybody looks at the door. Dow Huggins puts a hand on the latch, then looks at Grandpa Skaggs, who nods his head. Dow opens the door but blocks the way.*]

ANGELA (*from the doorway*). May I come in?

A DARKSOME FURRINER

RALPH. Angela! Go home.

[Dow stares at her a moment, then partially closes the door and turns about to face Grandpa Skaggs.]

DOW HUGGINS. Hit's a talkin' picture, pappy.

[Angela slips in. She has a basket over one arm and a violin case under the other. She stops near the table.]

RALPH. Angela! Eet'sa racket.

ANGELA (quickly). Bastante! *(She puts violin case and basket on table and goes up to Grandpa Skaggs.)*

Please let me stay . . . just a minute.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. This here meetin' is fer menfolks.

ANGELA. I know it, but won't you give me a break?

Won't you just let me try to explain why we're here?

Daddy gets everything all mixed up.

RALPH. That's a wrong, Angela. Da beega Sheriff, he meex 'em up. He taka me fo' a ride.

[Angela frowns at Ralph and makes a little gesture with her hand that says, "Pipe down."]

GUY (looking at Angela). That ain't nothin' to crow about. He let me drive his Ford car plumb around the courthouse.

[Angela smiles for Guy, who gapes and then, recovering, smiles back.]

ANGELA. Daddy doesn't understand what it's all about.

You see, we didn't know we were coming to a place where there wasn't room for anyone else. That's why we left New York, to get away from so many people.

RALPH (jumping up). In New York ees justa two kinds of peopla: racketeers, police-a-man.

ANGELA. Daddy had a restaurant and he and mama cooked and washed dishes and I waited on the tables and we all worked hard and tried to save money. We just wanted to find a place like where daddy lived when he was a boy in Italy, with hills and trees and a river and land where he could grow grapes and make wine like my grandfather did before the war. A man from Texas told us about the Ozarks . . .

A DARKSOME FURRINER

RALPH (*leaning forward*). Heesa name ees Stone. Heesa beega cowpunch'.

ANGELA. So we got some books about the Ozarks and read them. And the books said the Ozarks were grand and beautiful, and that man in Jasper told us you people in Hemmed-in-Holler would be so friendly and such good neighbors we never would want to leave. And that's all we wanted, just a place to live and have friends and be happy.

RALPH (*jumping up*). That'sa right. Be happy.

ANGELA. And I brought something I want to show you. Won't you sit down and let me bring it to you?

[*They sit, slowly. Angela goes to basket and begins pulling corks out of wine bottles.*]

GUY (*his back to Angela, trying to whisper*). Give the little gal a break, pappy.

[*Grandpa Skaggs looks at him and he retreats, with his gun, between bench and table. Dow and Bland watch Angela. Guy and Ralph listen eagerly to Grandpa Collins.*]

GRANDPA COLLINS (*after spitting toward fireplace*). Well, hit looks like we orter lay the blame onto them fellers thet come up in here a-visitin' an' then take and write books about us. Ef we don't ketch them fellers an' yoke 'em out of here, the whole danged shootin' match of the world will come asheepin' up into the Holler.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit ain't the book-writers; hit's the book-readers thet orter be yoked.

GRANDPA COLLINS. They's too infernal many of them, but we could ketch all of them writers in a deadfall.

ANGELA (*a bottle of wine in each hand, offering one to Grandpa Skaggs*). This is some of daddy's wine. See? It's got his name on it and it's ten years old. If you'll just taste it, you'll see what good wine daddy can make.

[*Grandpa Skaggs looks at the bottle but doesn't take it.*]

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA SKAGGS. I ain't thirsty jest now, thank ye, miss.

ANGELA (*putting bottle on end of bench near him*). Angela is my name. Angela Cesarano. People call daddy Ralph.

RALPH. Raffaele Michelangelo Cesarano. Bot eesa mo' betta say Ralph. Ees American.

ANGELA (*to Grandpa Collins*). And this one is for you.

GRANDPA COLLINS (*sniffs at bottle without touching it*).

Hit smells like hair-dye to me, an' hair-dye is pizen. Give hit to yore pappy.

ANGELA (*laughing*). He'll want to sing if I do, but if you say it's all right . . . O.K.

[*She hands it to Ralph, goes back to the table, and takes violin out of its case. She returns to Grandpa Skaggs.*]

RALPH (*offering bottle to Bland Hill*). Have a drink; eet'sa good. (*Bland Hill shakes his head. To Dow.*)

Have a drink; make you happy. (*Dow shakes head.*)

To Guy.) Have a drink; make you feela beeg lika thees. (*Holds hand overhead as high as he can reach.*)

GUY (*reaching for the bottle, then jerking his hand back*).

I ain't in no hurry.

RALPH. That'sa right; drinka da wine slow lika thees. Saluté.

[*He drinks rapidly and long.*]

ANGELA. This was my grandfather's and now it's daddy's. (*Puts violin in Grandpa Skaggs' lap.*) When I was a little girl he would play me to sleep, and he still plays for my little brothers and sisters every night. Wouldn't you like to hear him play it, just once, and then I'll go away.

RALPH (*handing the bottle to Guy*). Ah, that'sa fine. Make you warm eenside. Make you singa song. Make you dance.

[*He comes over to Angela and Grandpa Skaggs. Guy takes a short drink, then looks at Grandpa Skaggs, who is handling the violin. Then he turns it up again and drinks until Dow Huggins takes it from him.*]

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*handing the violin back to Angela*).

Hit's a fine pretty fiddle, a heap sight finer than ary one I ever owned. I reckon a little music wouldn't hurt nobody.

[*Bland Hill takes bottle from Dow Huggins.*]

ANGELA (*passing the violin to Ralph*). Daddy's won't.

RALPH. That'sa fine. Eet'sa springtime in the Ozarks.

I playa da "Spring" a "Song" from Mendelssohn.

[*While he is tuning the violin, Angela goes to the table and gets a bottle of wine which she takes over to Grandpa Collins and puts into his hands, whispering something as she leans over his shoulder. As Ralph tries the strings, she takes two bottles to Dow Huggins and Bland Hill.*]

BLAND HILL (*as he takes bottle from her*). Par — lay — vous — Frainch?

ANGELA. Oui, M'sieu. Un petit peu.

BLAND HILL (*solemnly*). I do, too.

ANGELA. That's fine.

(*She comes back to the table as Ralph begins playing. She pushes the basket back and sits on the table beside Guy. She reaches back and gets the last bottle out of the basket and gives it to him. He lays his gun on the table and takes it eagerly; starts to drink, then offers it to her. She shakes her head and makes a dizzy gesture with her hand.*)

ANGELA. All for you.

[*Guy drinks. When he stops, Dow Huggins drinks, then Bland Hill; and finally, Grandpa Collins, who has been sniffing his bottle, turns it up and takes a long one. Then they all hold their bottles before them and listen to Ralph's playing. When he stops, they are all still for a moment, all watching Grandpa Skaggs. After a moment, Grandpa Skaggs slowly reaches for the bottle on the bench, lifts it slowly to his mouth and drinks with relish. He puts it back on the bench and takes out his snuff-box. He sneezes and wipes his nose with his beard.*]

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Thet there is fine pretty fiddlin'.

GRANDPA COLLINS. O' course, hit ain't as pyeart as yorn was away back yanner in '88.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit ain't as pyeart, but hit ain't the same kind. Thet there ain't jest fancy fiddlin'; hit's music-makin'.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Back yanner in '88 . . .

ANGELA (*to Grandpa Skaggs*). Won't you play one of your pieces?

RALPH (*offering his violin*). Sure! That'sa fine. Play a da heelbeely music.

ANGELA (*quickly*). B'stante!

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*looks long and levelly at Ralph*). I've done my fiddlin'.

ANGELA. Would you like to hear daddy play another one, just one more?

GRANDPA SKAGGS. He kin ef he's a mind to.

ANGELA. Play "Old Dan Tucker," daddy.

(She sits on the bench. The others show signs of interest, drink as Ralph tunes. He plays. Guy starts patting the floor with his foot; Dow Huggins follows a little later, then Bland Hill, and finally Grandpa Collins. Grandpa Skaggs marks the time with his head, then softly pats the floor with his foot. Ralph increases the tempo and Grandpa Collins drops his stick. Angela springs up and gives it back to him. He bobs his head and pats his foot more vigorously. Guy lifts his bottle again. Angela smiles and starts back to the bench. Guy yells wildly and grabs her and swings her around twice. Ralph bobs his head and steps up the beat. Then Grandpa Skaggs strikes the floor hard with his stick and rises from his chair. Guy and Angela part; Ralph stops. Everyone is quiet, waiting for Grandpa Skaggs to cut loose. He looks at Guy first, then he looks Angela over completely, head to foot, his glance traveling slowly and stopping about three seconds at her feet.)

A DARKSOME FURRINER

ANGELA. I . . . I'm sorry. I didn't know. I . . .

GRANDPA SKAGGS (*facing Guy suddenly*). Git down to thet spring and warsh yore face.

GRANDPA COLLINS. He'd best to take an all-over bath in hit.

[*Guy hesitates, then goes out with his head down. Grandpa Skaggs sits down and takes up his bottle. He drinks deliberately. Ralph mops his brow with a loud-colored silk handkerchief. Grandpa Collins, Bland Hill, and Dow Huggins drink in order. Bland Hill says something in a low voice to Dow Huggins, who nods yes. Bland comes up to Ralph, pulling a quart fruit jar out of his coat pocket.*

BLAND HILL. Recollect thet there Frainch licker they called conyack? Well, this here is some I made myse'f outa corn an' taters. Hit's right good an' hit shore helps a man up.

RALPH (*taking the jar*). Ah, cognac. That'sa gooda drink.

[*He turns up the jar and gulps twice lustily, then takes the jar from his lips and looks at it. For a moment nothing happens; then a cough explodes in his throat and his head rocks violently from side to side and a shudder runs through him to the floor. Angela rushes to him, but he recovers quickly. Angela stands by the table.*]

RALPH (*holding out the jar to Bland Hill*). By God, that'sa gooda stuff.

BLAND HILL. Take another'n.

ANGELA (*jabbing Ralph in the back*). Sure. Daddy likes it.

RALPH (*after looking at Angela, who jabs him again*). Sure. Eet'sa deleesh. [*He drinks again, but cautiously, then returns the jar to Bland Hill.*] Ah, that'sa fine cognac. Eet's so good you save eet fo' the snaka bite.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit's a right good cyore fer warts, too; hit'll take 'em off afore a feller kin find his hat.

A DARKSOME FURRINER

[Bland Hill sets the jar on the table and takes Guy's place by Angela. Dow Huggins goes behind the table to get on the other side of her.]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Kin ye play ary other good fiddlin' tune?

RALPH. Sure, playnty. W'at you like?

GRANDPA SKAGGS. I don't reckon ye ever heerd tell of "The Gal I Left Behind Me."

RALPH. Sure. That's a gooda one. I play eet fo' you.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. I don't keer ef ye do. I reckon I'm a fool about real fiddlin'. *(As Ralph prepares to play, Grandpa Skaggs looks at Bland Hill and Dow Huggins, who are goggle-eyeing Angela.)* I reckon youins had best git on out yanner and holp the puppy out o' thet spring.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Hit wouldn't do 'em no harm to git down in there with him.

[Dow and Bland look at Grandpa Skaggs to see whether he means it; then, taking their bottles, they go out like Guy, Dow in the lead.]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Play it now.

(He lifts his bottle and Grandpa Collins lifts his. They fall immediately into the spirit of Ralph's playing, bobbing heads and patting feet and, finally, punctuating the rhythm with their sticks. The door opens narrowly. Angela is leaning against the table, feet still but body slightly swaying. Grandpa Skaggs jumps up with a whoop and throws his stick to the floor. Grandpa Collins stares. With a mincing, rhythmic step, Grandpa Skaggs goes up to Angela and bows.)

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Will ye assist me in this here set?

[Hesitantly, then eagerly, she accepts. As they sashay forth, Grandpa Collins whoops.]

GRANDPA COLLINS. Lady to the right and gent to the left,
And balance on the corners.

[The door opens wide and Guy, Bland, and Dow re-

A DARKSOME FURRINER

enter boldly. They stand against the door and wall, beating the time with feet and hands.

GRANDPA COLLINS. Swing 'er, pappy, and promenade
The gal ye left behind ye.

GUY. Swing 'er, pappy.

BLAND. Go it, pappy.

RALPH. That'sa fine.

[Guy comes stepping up to them, clapping his hands. He puts his hand on Grandpa Skaggs' shoulder. Ralph stops playing and takes a step toward them, then stops. Grandpa Skaggs and Angela have broken; everyone is perfectly still as Grandpa Skaggs, his beard trembling, looks down on Guy. Slowly, Grandpa Skaggs lifts his right arm, his hand clenched as if it held the familiar hickory stick.]

GUY (*quietly*). Hit's about my time now, ain't it, pappy?

[Slowly, Grandpa Skaggs' arm comes down. His hand opens wide and he looks at it, then at Guy.]

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Well, I'll be bored fer the holler-horn ef hit ain't my great grandbaby astandin' up on his hind legs. The last one of us atalkin' like a man an' sort of actin' like one. But I'll be tarred an' feathered ef hit didn't take ye a tarnation long spell to do hit. When I was yore age, I'd done whupped my pappy and grandpappy both afore breakfast. I reck'n hit jest nacherly takes more growin' nowadays to make a man. Well, there she stands. Whut air ye goin' to do about hit?

[He turns away, picks up his stick, goes over to Grandpa Collins and says something to him in an undertone. Grandpa Collins rises. Guy and Angela look at each other, then at Ralph.]

GUY. Will ye play thet first one ye played fer us?

RALPH. Sure. Da "Spring" a "Song."

GRANDPA COLLINS (*nodding emphatically*). Thet's hit. These here folks ain't real furriners at all; they're jest Americans.

[Grandpa Skaggs nods and turns to Ralph.]

A DARKSOME FURRINER

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Ef youins need a extry hand agittin' things started over to yore place, why I reckon Guy here would be right willin' to help ye out.

GUY. You said it, pappy.

RALPH. That'sa fine.

[Grandpa Skaggs takes his bottle from the bench and, followed by Grandpa Collins with his bottle, starts to the door. Grandpa Skaggs opens door; Grandpa Collins takes lantern from mantel.]

GRANDPA COLLINS. Thet passel of finehaired folks, now, thet *was* furriners; they come up in '88.

GRANDPA SKAGGS. Hit was '89.

[Ralph begins playing, floating out their argument. Grandpa Collins goes out talking; Grandpa Skaggs looks at Guy and Angela dancing, then follows, closing the door after him. Bland Hill takes his gig from the wall and looks at Dow Huggins; Dow takes his gig and they go out. Ralph, still playing, starts waltzing toward the door. Guy and Angela circle him once as he goes. He turns at the door and finishes with a flourish. Guy and Angela do not break; they are looking at each other.]

RALPH. By God, Angela, that'sa too good.

[They keep on looking as the curtain drops.]

COQUINE
By
BOSWORTH CROCKER

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CAST

HEINRICH (HENRI) HEINE, *poet.*

ALEXANDER WEILL, *his friend.*

CAMILLE SELDEN (MOUCHE), (MOUCHETTE), *his friend.*

MATILDA (MATILDE) MIRAT, *his wife.*

DOCTOR.

PLACE. A room in the home of Heinrich Heine, Paris.

TIME. The second quarter of the 19th century.

COQUINE

As the curtain rises, Heinrich is lying on a couch. His friend, Weill, is seated opposite him.

HEINE. Weill, I don't hear the parrot. If the parrot is gone, then Matilde has left me.

WEILL (*looking into the kitchen*). Don't worry. The parrot is there in its cage.

HEINE (*listening*). I thought I heard Matilde laughing in the hall. She has such a merry laugh. It brightens my life. I loved Matilde as soon as I laid eyes on her, loved her passionately. Love has always been my happiness and my despair.

WEILL. Who was your first love, Henri?

HEINE. Little Veronica. Veronica was eight and I was eleven. She gave me a sprig of mignonette she had kissed. I saw her cold in death, red flowers spread about her. But I have never forgotten her. I must have a sprig of mignonette on my tomb when I die, Weill. Next . . .

WEILL. Yes, next — Henri?

HEINE. Josepha, the hangman's daughter. She told me weird legends and sang me odd songs. Was I not a German Jew? In our exile we found each other. She had magic for me. Then I went to Hamburg and met the great love of my life, Weill: Molly! My love, but betrothed to another. She did not love me. Long years afterward, I met her again. "Are you Molly?" I whispered; for all her first loveliness was gone. She seemed a tired old woman, almost. "Oh, those wild songs of yours," she said; she had read "Ich Grolle Nicht." "How did you know that I was so wretched?" We parted and I never saw her in the flesh again. But

COQUINE

her image is stamped forever on my heart. Afterward there were many women. . . . Then at the last: Matilde. I love, but always I suffer through my love. If my heart could be satisfied with easy charms, but deep down something is wanting.

WEILL. And has Mouchette brought that something to you?

HEINE. Yes, Mouchette has for me all that Matilde never had. Too late! She only wastes her exquisite youth on a doomed man. No, I must be grateful for Matilde. At least she is true to me.

WEILL. But there intelligence is wanting.

HEINE. No, no, not necessarily.

WEILL. Surely a little more wouldn't hurt her.

HEINE. Well, I grant you that. Matilde will always be a spoilt child, irresponsible; one minute all tears, the next all smiles. But I don't want a brilliant woman. I want a responsive woman; not deeper thought but deeper feeling. I have no faith in her.

WEILL. Not after all these years?

HEINE. She loves no one really; she is as incapable of love as she is of hate.

WEILL. A fatal good nature.

HEINE. The parrot, Coquine, and beefsteak satisfy her heart. Yes, she's like a child. But so long as she laughs, I must be content.

WEILL. How can she live without ever opening a book?

HEINE. Weill, she has never read a line of my poetry. She never will.

[There is a rap at the door.]

WEILL. Who's there, I wonder.

HEINE. Mouchette. Let her in. *(Weill opens the door. A young woman enters the room and crosses to Heine.)*
Mouchette! Dear Mouchette!

CAMILLE. Tell me you are suffering less today.

[She leans down and kisses his forehead. Weill steps into the kitchen.]

COQUINE

HEINE (*to Mouchette*). When you are here I can forget my suffering.

CAMILLE. If I could give you more strength for your beautiful songs!

[*Weill reënters as she speaks.*]

WEILL. Henri has a rival singer in the kitchen.

CAMILLE. You mean?

WEILL. The parrot, Coquine.

HEINE. Yes, Mouchette, when I hear that bird shrilling I lose my head and give way to the same blind fury I used to feel when the mocking little Christians at Düsseldorf changed my name from Harry to Harrüh — after the town scavenger's donkey.

CAMILLE. How cruel.

WEILL. All boys are savages.

HEINE. They seared my soul with that word, donkey. (*Camille kisses Heine's hand.*) I grew to feel a wild kinship with the beast, and suddenly I would stop railing at my tormentors, half afraid that I might begin to bray.

CAMILLE. Incredible! My poor Henri.

HEINE. Only the stubbornness of a donkey saved me from the torment of my school fellows there in Düsseldorf. After the two years at the Jewish shedar that old monastic school seemed a strange cold world.

WEILL. Well, a Christian boy might have fared no better.

[*The cackling of a parrot is heard in the next room and Heine's face registers nervousness.*]

CAMILLE. I can see that the parrot disturbs you. It ought not to be kept in the next room.

HEINE. Oh, I'm grateful when it isn't in *this* room.

WEILL. You should protest, Henri.

HEINE. If Matilde had any imagination she would understand without words.

WEILL. Imagination, hah! No more than the parrot.

HEINE. I tell you, Mouchette, when Coquine begins to screech every nerve in my body quivers.

COQUINE

CAMILLE. It's an outrage. The doctor should forbid it.

HEINE. Forbid? Huh, much good that would do.

WEILL. Well, it's your own fault, Henri; you should do something definite about it.

HEINE. But what? What? If I open my mouth to complain of the parrot she flies into a perfect fury. If only she would carry it along with her on her walks in the Bois de Boulogne, and to her *matinées*.

WEILL. Pluck up your courage and wring the parrot's neck.

HEINE. Matilde would leave me. Oh, she makes no bones of her preference for Coquine.

CAMILLE. But it isn't the same thing at all: her fondness for the parrot. Surely she wouldn't sacrifice your peace of mind to it.

HEINE. You don't understand, Mouche. But you are you, and not Matilde. How could you understand?

CAMILLE. Matilde loves you. Appeal to her reason.

HEINE. Loves? Yes. Yes, after Matilde's fashion. But reason? No, no, reason is utterly beyond Matilde. The bird is not only my rival but my enemy. For every grievance, real or imaginary, Matilde avenges herself by tormenting me through Coquine.

WEILL. There's only one way out. Get rid of Coquine.

HEINE. What do you suggest?

WEILL. Poison.

HEINE. But I am a poet, not a chemist.

WEILL. Since there's no help to be had from Matilde, I'll poison the parrot for you, Henri . . . little by little . . . day after day . . . while Matilde's out on her pleasure rounds.

HEINE. Oh, no, that would never do. Matilde might suspect. Besides, she would have the bird looked after. Then it would all come out.

CAMILLE. I agree with Henri. Matilde would want to account for it.

HEINE. Oh no, she would want *me* to account for it.

COQUINE

CAMILLE. It should be sudden, or not at all. Henri isn't strong enough to stand the long suspense.

WEILL. Then it shall be swift poison, one fell dose.

HEINE. But something that leaves no trace. Under any circumstances she would suspect me.

WEILL. Let her suspect. No coroner will hold an inquest on the body.

HEINE. All the rest of my life she would reproach me for disliking the bird.

WEILL. Pretend to take an interest in the parrot. Begin at once to act a part. Make friends with it.

HEINE. I would as soon kiss a donkey. Besides, to begin that at this late date would make her all the more suspicious.

CAMILLE. Just leave it to your good friend, Weill, here. He'll know how to arrange everything.

WEILL. You see, a beautiful young woman has confidence in me. I can't be so bad.

[All laugh.]

CAMILLE. It makes me so happy to think that Henri has one true friend. Life doesn't give us so many; sometimes none.

WEILL. So young, and so early disillusioned!

CAMILLE. Sorrow ages us faster than time.

WEILL. Now while you're here, Camille, I'll just run out and consult with the nearest chemist. The sooner it's all over with, the better.

HEINE. Now? Today? But I want it to happen when you can stay here with me, to help me through the scene that's sure to follow.

WEILL. Don't distress yourself; I'll stay and see it through. Well now, I'm off.

[Weill goes out.]

HEINE. If only Matilde doesn't come back too soon. But that ought not to worry me; she always keeps me waiting for my dinner.

CAMILLE. If only I could get the dinner for you! Any-

COQUINE

thing to serve you! Oh, if I were a great poet like you, then, only then could I tell you all the wonderful things I think and feel about you. Why am I so helpless to help one to whom I would give all that is best in me?

HEINE. I have your presence, hold your little hand, listen to your dear voice. So long as you don't take away that joy. . . .

CAMILLE. Sometimes I feel that I can't keep on pushing myself in here against Matilde's wish. She hardly ever speaks to me now.

HEINE. Oh, little Mouchette, be brave for my sake. Be brave and don't let Matilde drive you away from me. Promise me you will come to me. Promise.

CAMILLE. Yes, I will come.

HEINE. Whatever Matilde does? Oh, she will do nothing that could matter.

CAMILLE. If only she would speak out, then I could explain to her, touch her better nature, perhaps. But to give me one hard look, and then leave the room till I go!

HEINE. What Matilde says or does can't matter now; it's your coming that matters. After all, it won't be so much longer: this living death. Today I can hardly lift my eyes.

[Camille weeps a little. Heine repeats his own poem.]

What means this tear so lovely
That dims my sight at last?
It must have lingered with me
From old, old times long past.

It once had shining sisters
But now they all are shed
And with my joys and sorrows
Down the dark night are fled.

COQUINE

Fled, too, like misty vapours,
The little stars of blue
That sailed those joys and sorrows
My heart, my heart into.

Ah, love itself has vanished
Like breath beyond recall.
Flow tear, so old, so lonely,
Flow down and end it all.

That, Mouchette, was written to your one and only
rival, Molly, the love of my youth.

CAMILLE. If only I could inspire such songs!

[Footsteps are heard, and Weill bursts into the room.]

WEILL. No Matilde yet?

CAMILLE. No Matilde.

HEINE. But she may be here any minute. You, Weill,
got back quickly. You must have completed your bar-
gain in a great hurry.

WEILL. And now for the dark deed.

HEINE. What have you there, Weill?

WEILL. Ask me no questions, then you'll have nothing on
your conscience.

HEINE. Oh, what a storm will break.

WEILL. Thank God, the bird can't betray us.

CAMILLE. Only act as you always act.

WEILL. Yes, grumble as usual.

HEINE. Well, surely not without cause.

WEILL. And now if by any chance Matilde comes while
I'm in the kitchen, see that you keep her in here.

CAMILLE. Then I must leave at once. If she finds me
here, she's sure to go straight out there.

*[Weill goes into the kitchen and closes the door behind
him.]*

HEINE. Mouchette, Mouchette, my heart misgives me.
Weill may bungle, leave some trace.

COQUINE

[Faint muffled sounds from the direction of the kitchen. Heine and Camille listen anxiously. Weill comes back into the room.]

WEILL. The deed is done.

CAMILLE. So quietly?

HEINE. And so soon. Safely dead?

WEILL. It can't be so long now.

HEINE. Oh, Weill . . . man . . . no clues?

WEILL. None. Now let Matilde return for the death struggle.

HEINE. It will be unendurable, Weill.

CAMILLE. Thank heaven, you don't have to endure it alone, Henri.

WEILL. Let us be thankful that there will soon be an end to the torment the parrot has caused you, and that the deed is irrevocably done.

[Sound of footfalls.]

HEINE. Matilde! Her step! *(Enter Matilde.)* So! Matilde! Home at last!

MATILDE *(looks around, ignores Camille)*. It's not so late, is it, Weill?

WEILL. That depends.

MATILDE. That's right; always side with Henri against me.

[Matilde goes into the kitchen and closes the door none too gently.]

CAMILLE *(rises from her chair)*. I must go.

HEINE. Don't let her drive you away. Ignore her as she ignores you.

CAMILLE. In her own home? Besides, you must have your dinner, and in this mood she won't step foot in this room again till I've gone.

HEINE. Promise me to come back soon, Mouche?

CAMILLE. Yes.

HEINE. Very soon.

CAMILLE. I assure you! As soon as possible.

WEILL *(in a low voice)*. When the storm has blown over.

COQUINE

CAMILLE (*softly to Weill*). Thank you for staying.

HEINE. If *you* were to go and desert me now!

[*Camille kisses Heine's forehead, bows to Weill and goes out quickly.*]

WEILL (*in a low voice*). Not a squawk from that damned bird.

HEINE. What do you make of it?

WEILL. Maybe it's all over quietly and Matilde hasn't even noticed yet.

HEINE. Oh no, that couldn't happen. Can't you go in, and see for yourself?

WEILL. What! Call Matilde's attention to it? No, no, we can only wait.

[*Heine sniffs.*]

HEINE. Fish for dinner tonight. Smell it.

MATILDE (*bustling in. Pulls a table to Heine's bedside, lays the tablecloth*). Yes, Weill, as I was saying, if only women hung together the way you and Henri do . . .

HEINE. The way you hang together with that little woman who has had to leave because of your insult? Can't you have the courtesy even to bow to her? Where have you been all afternoon?

MATILDE. Out walking in the Bois.

HEINE. Did you forget that we have to eat?

MATILDE. Do I ever forget?

HEINE. No, thank heaven; you're too fond of eating, yourself, to forget that. All afternoon in the Bois? And in your best gown? It took all I made from the Vitaputzl poem to pay for it, Weill.

MATILDE. That's right, talk about what it cost you. Isn't it a pretty dress, Weill?

WEILL (*diplomatically*). Almost as pretty as its wearer.

MATILDE. Am I still pretty, Weill?

WEILL. Doesn't your mirror tell you so?

HEINE. She's getting too fat. She eats far too much.

MATILDE. Oh . . . as for me . . . anything does for me.

COQUINE

HEINE. So long as you have enough of it; my gorge rises at some of the things you devour.

MATILDE. I'm not a poet, thank my stars.

HEINE. You might be a poet at the art of cooking, but that would please me too well.

[*Faint sound from the kitchen. Heine and Weill strain their ears.*]

MATILDE. I have fish for tonight, a real bargain. Wait and see the fine sauce I am making for it.

HEINE. Is the fish fresh?

MATILDE. Would I buy stale fish?

HEINE. Of course, you would be the first one to be taken in.

MATILDE. Tell me, Weill, isn't that the same thing as calling me a fool?

WEILL. Matilde is developing subtlety, Henri.

HEINE. So I see.

[*A sound comes from the parrot. The men exchange anxious looks.*]

MATILDE. You'll sweat for your dinner tomorrow night, Henri, to pay you off for making fun of me. As for you, Weill, you can eat your dinner at home.

WEILL. A costly revenge. (*Matilde goes into the kitchen; closes door.*) Does it strike you Coquine's croak is growing weaker?

HEINE. It seems to me as brazen as ever.

WEILL. No, no, believe me, in a little while now there will be no more Coquine.

HEINE. Suppose the chemist has made some mistake!

WEILL. That isn't possible.

HEINE. Weill, Matilde must never suspect. She would leave me on the spot.

WEILL. Wouldn't you be better off?

HEINE. What? Who would step into Matilde's shoes?

WEILL. A hundred women who worship your genius.

HEINE. At long range, but shut them up once with a man who is only half alive . . .

COQUINE

WEILL. Martyrdom is the crown of love; women snatch at it.

MATILDE (*from the kitchen*). My pretty Coquine! Come, eat from my finger, my pretty Coquine. Pretty, pretty, pretty! Come, speak to your mama. Say, "Kiss me, Matilde."

HEINE. "Kiss me, Matilde!" Wasting the little sentiment she has on a poll parrot. What an irony.

WEILL. Meanwhile neglecting the dinner of a genius, a greater irony. Well, console yourself; it's the last time.

HEINE. If the bird dies before dinner, Matilde will spoil the meal for us.

MATILDE (*opens the kitchen door and steps into the room with the parrot on her shoulder. Both men gaze at it fixedly*). Weill! Weill, will you do me a favour?

HEINE. Bringing that killjoy in here! Can't you leave it in its cage? Must you carry it on your shoulder like a decoration?

MATILDE. Even a bird needs to be brightened up a little bit. Look at her head, how it hangs down; and her plumage, all ruffled. Poor Coquine, has she missed her mama? You men are so selfish. (*To Heine.*) How would you like to be shut up in a cage all the time?

HEINE. Well, am I not, most of the time?

MATILDE. What's the matter, Coquine? Pretty, pretty, pretty! Why don't you answer Matilde? Why don't you talk to me?

HEINE. As a rule she saves her worst screeching for my ears.

MATILDE. It's because Coquine wants to be friends with you. Sit up, Coquine. Is there something wrong with my pretty Coquine? There, there; we'll go back where we're wanted, into the nice kitchen, with its mama.

[*Matilde takes the parrot into the kitchen.*]

WEILL. With half an eye, you can see the bird's on its last legs. If Matilde wasn't blind . . .

COQUINE

MATILDE (*reënters*). Weill, Weill, in all my hurry, Weill, I forgot the bread. Will you run to the baker's and buy me a loaf?

HEINE. *Run* to the baker's? In his dress suit?

MATILDE. Well, run or walk, just so you bring me the bread.

WEILL. Yes, I'll fetch it.

MATILDE. Give him the money, Henri.

HEINE. Where is the hundred francs I gave you this morning, Matilde?

MATILDE. Didn't I owe it all to the tradesmen?

HEINE. Don't lie to me, Matilde. You have probably bought yourself new gloves. Yes, Weill, that's an expensive taste she picked up in her aunt's glove shop.

MATILDE. Where you bought me?

HEINE. And was badly cheated in the bargain. Here's the money, Weill.

[*Hands the money to Matilde.*]

WEILL. Never mind the change.

[*Matilde puts the change in her pocket.*]

HEINE. Give it to him, Matilde.

MATILDE. It won't hurt him to spend a franc. Isn't he going to eat my fish?

HEINE. Then give it back to me, Matilde. Don't you cost me enough?

MATILDE. Oh, yes, I know that you bought me; but I shall never leave you whether you love me or not, whether you ill treat me or not.

HEINE (*significant glance at Weill*). We shall see . . . I wonder . . .

[*Weill goes out for the bread.*]

MATILDE. You needn't wonder. I don't forget you bought me. Besides, it would please your friend, Camille, too much.

HEINE. Aha! Now we have the true reason: another woman.

COQUINE

MATILDE. I'd like to see any other woman do for you what I do.

HEINE. Another woman might have carried out the doctor's orders. Where are the hot applications he told you to use today? No, you had no time for me. You must walk in the Bois de Boulogne.

MATILDE. Couldn't your friend, Camille, do something for you? What is she good for, anyhow?

[There is a rap on the door.]

MATILDE (*calling out*). Come in.

DOCTOR (*enters*). Good evening.

HEINE. Ah, good evening, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Well, and how is my patient this evening?

HEINE. No improvement, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Haven't the hot applications helped the pain?

HEINE. Hot applications! They haven't been tried.

DOCTOR. Haven't been tried? My good woman, what earthly use is there in my prescribing for your husband if my instructions are not to be carried out?

HEINE. But my wife has not been at home this afternoon.

DOCTOR. I see. My good woman, unless your husband can receive proper care here he had better be taken to a good hospital.

MATILDE (*belligerently*). Now what is wrong?

DOCTOR. Hot applications, if you please, every half hour.

MATILDE (*to Heine*). Why didn't you say so this morning?

HEINE. It is my impression that I did.

MATILDE. Well, I didn't hear you.

HEINE. Probably not. The parrot was screeching, I suppose, and drowned my voice.

DOCTOR. Hot applications and absolute quiet; no nervous excitement. (*Examines Heine's back.*) Where is the pain sharpest, here?

COQUINE

HEINE. Yes, that's the spot.

DOCTOR. Madam, oblige me with a large towel and a flannel cloth wrung out of hot water, as hot as possible.

MATILDE. In a minute.

[Enter Weill with the loaf of bread.]

DOCTOR. At once, my good woman, if you please.

HEINE. Matilde.

MATILDE *(taking the loaf from Weill)*. Well, don't I have to look after my fish? Shall I let my fish burn up?

WEILL. Good evening, Doctor, what do you think of the patient?

DOCTOR *(grumpily)*. I think . . . unless he receives better care, I shall cease calling. It will be useless to come.

HEINE. Doctor, if you understood the situation, perhaps . . .

DOCTOR *(significantly)*. Oh, I quite understand.

MATILDE *(comes in carrying a heavy roll of flannel and a large towel)*. There! Is that hot enough for you?

[She flirts the towel in his face with all her strength.]

HEINE *(outraged)*. Matilde! Have you no self-control? You have hit the doctor in the eye.

[Matilde leaves the room.]

HEINE. She lost her temper, Doctor, she'll be sorry for it.

DOCTOR. You needn't apologize. I quite understand.

[Doctor adjusts compress.]

HEINE. Doctor, such an insult shall never be offered you again.

WEILL. Don't worry, Henri, the doctor appreciates your position.

DOCTOR. The hot applications will give you some relief. Till tomorrow, then!

[Matilde comes in carrying dishes; the doctor leaves, with a bow to Heine.]

HEINE. Matilde, that was inexcusable of you.

MATILDE. Always fault finding! No woman in the world would live the life I live.

[She sets the table.]

COQUINE

HEINE. The doctor doesn't come here for pleasure.

MATILDE. Nothing but blame! Even the doctor . . . always meddling and making more trouble.

HEINE. At least show him respect. He doesn't get much out of me for his services.

MATILDE. What does he do for you, anyhow?

HEINE. You drive away my best friends. Don't, I beg of you, drive away my doctor. (*Matilde goes back to kitchen.*) Weill, Weill, tonight of all nights, *this!* Now what will happen? Why do I struggle to live at all? What is life worth on these terms?

WEILL. Times will change, Henri. Some day your Uncle Solomon will die and leave you his money.

HEINE. She'd spend it all fast enough, if he ever does. But no, I shall die first.

WEILL. Cheer up. At least Coquine will soon be out of the way.

HEINE. Matilde will leave me. I am convinced of it.

[*Matilde enters with more dishes, arranges table.*]

MATILDE. All these years I've waited on you, Henri, hand and foot. And what does the doctor say: "My good woman, there is no earthly use in my prescribing for your husband if my instructions are not to be carried out." "At once, my good woman." Yes, let my fish burn to save him a minute's time. Good woman this, good woman that!

HEINE. You exaggerate, Matilde.

MATILDE. Oh, yes, I exaggerate. I am always all wrong.

HEINE. Don't vex your head. You weren't made for it.

MATILDE. Now what does he mean by that, Weill?

HEINE. Don't look for hidden meanings.

MATILDE (*brightening at a thought*). Wait till you see the bargain I got in fish, both of you.

HEINE. You save on the wrong things, Matilde, whenever you *do* try to save. Give up these false economies.

MATILDE. You hear him, Weill; everything wrong! And

COQUINE

all these years I have tried to please him. Even though it wasn't so much he paid for me. Yes, I have given you all, Henri. You needn't think that I don't know you bought me. Why do I put up with you? I'll tell you why, Weill. Henri is the only man who ever took my fancy. And they say that Germans are more faithful than Frenchmen.

WEILL. Jews are said to be most faithful of all.

MATILDE. Well, what have Jews to do with it? Do you think I would marry a Jew?

[*She goes into the kitchen.*]

HEINE. Weill, I beg of you, Matilde has no idea that I am a Jew.

WEILL. But how is that possible? It seems, in the ways that count most, Matilde is almost a stranger to you.

MATILDE (*brings in the bread and the butter*). No, Henri, I will never leave you. Never.

HEINE. But I don't want you to.

MATILDE. However you treat me I shall stay with you always, always. Wherever you go, I'll go. I am yours because you have bought me. But I've bought you, too. You know the price. I shall stay with you always.

HEINE. What a scene! And what would you do if I left you?

MATILDE. Kill myself at your feet.

HEINE. Well then, come, let us get on with the dinner.

MATILDE. No, Henri, I am yours and you are mine, for life.

HEINE. Very well then, feed me. Let the dinner deserve that we eat it kneeling. (*Exit Matilde to kitchen.*) Weill, couldn't you slip into the kitchen and take a look at Coquine?

WEILL. Let well enough alone.

MATILDE (*comes in carrying the fish on a platter. Serves Weill and Heine*). Come now; here we are. Sit down, Weill.

COQUINE

HEINE (*tastes the fish*). Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! This fish! This fish!

MATILDE (*disappointed*). You don't like the fish?

HEINE. It speaks for itself. It speaks a bad language. It speaks evilly to my nose.

MATILDE. What do you think of the fish, Weill?

WEILL (*sniffing disgustedly*). I think it is rotten fish.

MATILDE (*flaring up; picks up the platter and fires the fish at him*). There! Now you can smell it better.

HEINE. Outrageous! Throwing the fish in our guest's face! Get a cloth now and wipe that mess off of Weill's suit.

WEILL. Well, this means I can't go on to the dinner; I must go to the cleaner's instead.

[*Matilde goes out.*]

HEINE. This is something new, Weill; I shall be getting jealous. (*Matilde comes back with a wet cloth and wipes off Weill's suit.*) As a rule she never does these things to anyone but me.

WEILL. Et voilà maris!

HEINE. Yes, this is marriage for you.

WEILL. My wife is as different from Matilde as a dove is from a peacock.

MATILDE. What would you do if you were my husband?

WEILL. I should throw the dishes in my own face.

HEINE. Oh, there wouldn't be dishes enough for that.

[*Exit Matilde. There is a scream from the kitchen.*]

MATILDE. Coquine, Coquine, my little Coquine, speak to Matilde, speak.

WEILL. Aha! The end . . . at last!

HEINE. And now for the deluge.

MATILDE (*rushing into the room overcome with grief*).

Henri! Weill! Henri! My Coquine! My little Coquine, Coquine . . . is . . . dead.

HEINE. I am sorry. But don't, don't make another scene now, Matilde, I beg of you.

COQUINE

MATILDE. Yes, yes, "don't make a scene"; when all that I have is dead, dead, dead. Little angel, Coquine! What does it matter to you? Now you're satisfied, Henri. Now my poor darling is out of your way. Coquine! Yes, Henri . . . Coquine . . . you always hated her, little Coquine. Now you're happy. You used to threaten to kill her. How do I know that you didn't, between the two of you?

HEINE (*with great dignity*). Matilde! That will quite do.

WEILL. Yes, that is going a little *too* far.

MATILDE. You hated her, hated her; my pet, my angel, Coquine . . . Coquine!

[*Matilde goes back into the kitchen, and can be heard giving way to unrestrained grief.*]

HEINE. Weill, never let her dream . . . She would be incapable of forgiving me. Weill, my friend, who would have believed it? Such wild grief! Here are depths we have never plumbed. Weill, what a fate is mine! To suffer so for Matilde, to turn my sufferings into songs to bring in money; dependent for my very life, dependent on a woman who values me less than a dead poll parrot.

MATILDE. Coquine, Coquine . . . dead . . . dead. No, no, Coquine, come back . . . to your . . . mama . . . Matilde. My little Coquine! My angel! Coquine! Coquine!

HEINE. Oh no, this will never, never do. (*Calls out.*) Matilde! Matilde! (*Enter slowly Matilde, the very image of woe.*) There, there, do not grieve, Matilde; I will make up to you for Coquine.

MATILDE. Coquine! Coquine! Coquine! Coquine!

WEILL. Consider your poor husband.

MATILDE (*beats her breast*). Now I have nothing in the world, nothing! Nothing!

HEINE. I beg of you, Matilde, I beg of you . . .

MATILDE. Nothing in the world now. Nothing!



ANTHONY DAVE

COQUINE

HEINE. Am I nothing?

MATILDE. Nothing, nothing.

HEINE. I will buy you a new pair of gloves.

MATILDE. Nothing.

HEINE. A new hat!

MATILDE. Coquine . . . always here . . . in your cage
. . . like a ray of sunshine.

HEINE (*with a gesture of despair*). I will buy you a new
gown.

MATILDE. Always waiting here . . . so gay . . . now
. . . I have . . . nothing.

HEINE. So I am nothing. (*Mordant.*) Won't you admit
at least that my voice is more musical than Co-
quine's?

MATILDE (*wildly flaring up*). Yes, yes, I know how you
hated her.

HEINE. She had a shrewish note.

MATILDE. What have I now? What have I now?

HEINE (*trying to rally her*). Since she had to go . . .
except for your sake, I am not sorry. If I am to have
a rival, I want a rival worthy of me.

MATILDE (*wringing her hands, beating her breast*). Co-
quine! Coquine! Coquine! Coquine! Coquine!

HEINE. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!

WEILL. Come, come, Matilde, you are wearing yourself,
and poor Henri, out.

MATILDE. My dear little Coquine! Dead! Dead! I
shall never hear your gay voice again. Gone . . .
gone . . . my darling . . . my angel! Coquine! Co-
quine! Coquine! Coquine!

HEINE. "Coquine, Coquine . . ." no, no, this is unbear-
able.

MATILDE. My angel . . . Coquine! My little ray of
sunshine! Always waiting for me . . . here . . . in
your cage . . . so patient . . . so gay . . . And what
have I now? Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Noth-
ing! Nothing!

COQUINE

HEINE (*at the end of his endurance*). No, no, no! (*Desperately.*) Weill! Weill! For God's sake, take this money and buy her another Coquine.

Curtain

SKINFLINT

A Welsh Comedy

By

RONALD ELWY MITCHELL

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CAST

NAIN, *an old woman.*

HUGHIE, *her grandson.*

MODRYB JANE, *a simple female relative.*

WILLIE FFOULKES, *a pious villager.*

AHOLIBAH JONES, *a less pious villager.*

EIRA, *her stepdaughter.*

SCENE. A cottage in West North Wales. Late afternoon in autumn.

TIME. Not so long ago.

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NAIN. Did you feed the pigs?

MODRYB JANE. I did.

NAIN. How many eggs did you find to-day?

MODRYB JANE. Not but six.

NAIN. Six! For why do those old hens think I keep them, tell me?

MODRYB JANE. Well, indeed, I don't think they can help not laying eggs and them not feeling like it.

NAIN. I feed them, don't I?

MODRYB JANE (*grudgingly*). Yes, I suppose.

NAIN. Then what more do they want? (*Modryb Jane is gloomily silent. Nain fixes her with a stern eye.*) Are you siding with those old hens against me?

MODRYB JANE. Oh, no. Not at all. No, indeed.

NAIN. Sulky you are about something. What is it?

MODRYB JANE. Nothing.

NAIN. Come on. Out with it.

MODRYB JANE (*gaining courage as she speaks*). Well, twice the work I've done this week and I get no more than a shilling for it.

NAIN. So that's it, is it? Complaining again.

MODRYB JANE (*weakly*). No, not complaining. Just saying I was.

NAIN. There's ungrateful for you! You, who have no husband and no money at all, a poor cousin that I took in out of pity. Look you, Modryb Jane, will you never realize that it costs me my good hard-earned money to keep you here in this house?

MODRYB JANE (*indignantly*). But I work for it, with my fingers to the bone, every day.

NAIN. There's gratitude for you! And me losing money on you and maybe ending my days in a workhouse.

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MODRYB JANE. You wouldn't keep me a day longer if you lost a farthing on me, and you know it.

NAIN. For shame, Modryb Jane, you can't deny, no indeed, that I feed and clothe you.

MODRYB JANE. If I starved to death in your house *you'd* be put in prison and if *I* had no clothes *I'd* be put in prison, so you'd lose me whatever.

NAIN. I'm thinking I've heard all this talk before.

MODRYB JANE. And there's your grandson, Hughie, too.

NAIN. Well, now, what about my grandson Hughie?

MODRYB JANE. You try and keep him away from the girls, don't you? I'm simple, they tell me, but I can see that plain enough.

NAIN. Go on.

MODRYB JANE. The whole village knows that you're so mean that you'd keep him as long as you could, so you wouldn't have to be paying a man a proper wage, and that's the truth, yes, indeed.

NAIN. I'll teach them. They're jealous of me, that's what it is, jealous because I have a good farm and the best milk in the county.

MODRYB JANE. Jealous they are because they have to pay their servants wages, and you don't.

NAIN. You don't get a penny more from me, Modryb Jane, until next Saturday, and if I'd known you were going to be so peevish I wouldn't have given you your shilling this morning.

MODRYB JANE. Oh, it's a hard life a woman leads when she's simple, so that the men will have nothing in the world to do with her.

NAIN. Stupid nonsense, Modryb Jane! Crafty enough you are to be any man's wife. It's your looks puts them off.

MODRYB JANE. Indeed, and your own looks is no better, and you fifteen years nearer the grave than myself.

NAIN. You don't know how near the grave you are this very minute, Modryb Jane, so be careful what you say.

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MODRYB JANE (*looking off*). There's Hughie now, coming through the gate. Someone he has with him.

NAIN. Who is it, tell me.

MODRYB JANE. She's gone now.

NAIN (*suspiciously*). She?

MODRYB JANE. Maybe I was wrong. Oh, he's carrying an eiderdown.

NAIN. A what? (*Hughie enters with eiderdown, a little embarrassed.*) Where did you get that?

HUGHIE. This? I bought it.

NAIN. Bought it? But you have no money.

HUGHIE. I got it from Robert Jones, the Shop.

NAIN. If you promised him money for that thing I won't let you have a penny for it and you can take it back this minute before he wants five shillings on it for wear and tear. I know him.

MODRYB JANE. It's very pretty.

HUGHIE. I didn't promise him nothing. He sold it to me.

NAIN. You gave him something for it. You must have.

HUGHIE. Of course. I gave him a sheep.

NAIN. A sheep! You gave him one of my sheep for that old thing?

HUGHIE. He said it was the best one he had in the shop.

NAIN. It's after your father you take, Hughie, to be doing a crazy thing like that. Giving Robert Jones one of my sheep for an eiderdown when one of my hens that's too old to lay any eggs could buy up the whole of his shop and his savings, too.

HUGHIE. I've a right to buy things, and me working the farm for you.

MODRYB JANE. Isn't that just what I said?

NAIN. Hold your tongue, Modryb Jane.

HUGHIE. I've a reason to buy things, too. I'm getting married.

NAIN. What?

HUGHIE. I'm old enough.

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MODRYB JANE. Of course.

NAIN. You can't get married. I won't let you.

HUGHIE. How will you stop me?

NAIN. I won't have another woman in this house.

MODRYB JANE. She might help with the work.

NAIN. There's no more work to be done than you can do, Modryb Jane, and I'd have to be feeding her and clothing her, too.

HUGHIE. If you won't have her in this house, we'll go away, yes, indeed.

NAIN. You wouldn't leave me, Hughie, and me having to take in a strange man to work the farm for me.

MODRYB JANE. And having to pay him a wage, too. Yes, indeed, that would be an upset.

NAIN (*turning on her furiously*). If you say another word without being spoken to, right to bed you'll go with no supper. Very tired I am of hearing you speak, Modryb Jane.

[*There is a commotion outside. Willie Ffoulkes enters, dragging in Eira, a frightened wisp of a girl.*]

WILLIE. This is the kind of rubbish that hangs around your garden gate, Nain Tan y Grisiau.

HUGHIE. Let her go, will you!

WILLIE. Oho! You know her, I see.

NAIN. Is that the girl?

HUGHIE. Yes, it is.

WILLIE. What goings on in your house are these, Nain Tan y Grisiau, or are you ashamed to tell me?

NAIN. No, indeed, I'm not.

HUGHIE. I'm going to marry this girl.

NAIN. Willie Ffoulkes, Hughie is not going to marry this girl or any other girl for a long while yet.

HUGHIE. I tell you I am, and today, too.

NAIN. Today? It's impossible. Are you mad? Selling a sheep, buying an eiderdown, and getting married all on the same day! What's come over you, Hughie?

MODRYB JANE. Isn't the girl here the stepdaughter of

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that Aholibah Jones that lives on the road to the mountain?

NAIN. Is that who she is? That makes it all the more impossible.

WILLIE (*to Hughie*). You must marry her at once.

NAIN. Nonsense!

WILLIE. You wouldn't leave the girl with the Joneses on the mountain road?

NAIN. Why not?

WILLIE. Haven't you often said yourself how wicked Aholibah was?

HUGHIE. Yes, indeed.

NAIN. That's no reason why you should marry her, when she can bring nothing with her, coming from the Joneses.

WILLIE. You should have the good of the village at heart.

NAIN. And who are you, Willie Ffoulkes, to be giving orders to my grandson?

WILLIE. It's my duty to see that there's no bad living going on in this village, for that's what will be going on if the girl stays where she is with Aholibah Jones for her guardian and your Hughie after her; and knowing you, Nain Tan y Grisiau, for a score of years, I wouldn't trust your grandson out of my sight for an hour, no, indeed!
[*Eira suddenly bursts into loud weeping.*]

HUGHIE. Ah, don't cry, 'nghalon i. Don't listen to them.
[*She goes on weeping.*]

MODRYB JANE. Ah, the creature!

HUGHIE. Come out now, and let them argue all they want.
[*He leads Eira out. Willie Ffoulkes is about to follow when Nain stops him.*]

NAIN. Wait, Willie Ffoulkes.

WILLIE. Well?

NAIN. I have something to say to you.

WILLIE. Then say it quickly. My pony and trap are out there on the road waiting for me.

NAIN (*mysteriously*). Come here! (*He comes.*) Did you notice anything strange about the girl, tell me?

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WILLIE. Strange? No.

NAIN. Did you hear her speak one word?

WILLIE (*thoughtfully*). No, I don't think I did.

NAIN. She was silent, wasn't she, from the moment you brought her in until just then when she suddenly cried.

WILLIE. Yes.

NAIN. And you still think there's nothing strange about her? Did you see her eyes?

WILLIE. No. She kept her head down all the time.

NAIN. She didn't want you to see them. Willie Ffoulkes, listen to my words. She had the eyes of a witch.

WILLIE. What are you saying?

NAIN. I saw them.

MODRYB JANE. There *was* something queer about the way she looked.

NAIN. I'm glad you noticed it, Modryb Jane.

WILLIE. Do you think we should have her locked up this minute?

NAIN. Ah, Willie Ffoulkes, we can afford to be merciful. All I ask is that she does not get my Hughie bach anwyl into her clutches.

MODRYB JANE. And she looking so innocent and saying no word and then bursting into loud crying! Who in the world can you trust, isn't it?

WILLIE. Hughie shall not marry a witch nor live in a house with one while I am here to save him. I'll talk with him alone. He'll see reason and myself telling him.

NAIN. Send the girl here to me, Willie Ffoulkes, when you find them on the road. Catch them up in your pony and trap, and I'll talk with her while you talk with him; then we shall both have our reward.

WILLIE (*eagerly*). Reward?

NAIN. Yes. I shall have my grandson again, and you the satisfaction that no bad living is going on in Pentrebychan.

WILLIE (*disappointed*). Oh!

NAIN. It's so good for Pentrebychan, Willie Ffoulkes, to

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have a man like you to keep its people on the right path. There's many that would be on the road of shame now but for you.

WILLIE. Thank you, Nain Tan y Grisiau. Even a word is some comfort to a poor man like me. How is your farm doing now?

NAIN. Oh, badly, badly. No milk from the cows, and Hughie selling all my sheep, and the hens refusing to lay.

WILLIE (*pointing to ceiling*). It's a fine ham you have up there.

NAIN. Last year's, Willie Ffoulkes, and it will be great fortune if I eat a bite more when that is finished with, and myself having to keep Hughie and poor Modryb Jane there with her missing wits, and pay them wages, too.
[*Nain sighs deeply.*]

WILLIE. Well, I'll be going now, or they'll be gone too far to find.

NAIN. Thank you, Willie Ffoulkes, for the comfort you brought me.

WILLIE. It's my hard lot to be helping others and getting little for it except a sense of doing my honest duty.

NAIN. Ah, that's the best reward, Willie Ffoulkes, after all.

[*Willie looks again at the ham, opens his mouth, shuts it and goes.*]

MODRYB JANE. I had a feeling that there was something he wanted to say.

NAIN. Modryb Jane, go after him. Let him talk to Hughie and you bring the girl back to me. I want to be sure of a talk with her. He has his pony and trap, hasn't he?

MODRYB JANE. It looks like a donkey cart to me.

NAIN. What does it matter, simpleton? Quick now, and shout!

[*She bundles her off.*]

MODRYB JANE. Willie Ffoulkes! Wait for me just one minute bach. Willie Ffoulkes!

SKINFLINT

[Her voice dies away. Nain goes to a basket and starts on some sewing. Presently a face is seen at the window near the back door. Nain goes on working. Then Aholibah Jones appears at the door.]

NAIN (*turning*). Is that you, Aholibah Jones, darkening my doorway?

AHOLIBAH. It is.

NAIN. For why have you come? You is it who has put a spell on my hens so it's no eggs they lay now?

AHOLIBAH. I've come here to find out what has happened to my stepdaughter.

NAIN. How should I know what has happened to her?

AHOLIBAH. Your grandson is after her. I know what's going on.

NAIN. Don't think I want her here. No use she is to me.

AHOLIBAH. And no use is your Hughie to me. I'm looking for something better.

NAIN. That's what I'm looking for, too.

AHOLIBAH. And I can't afford to lose her just now. I'm a poor woman, and she works well about the house, though I never tell her so.

NAIN. I can't afford to lose my Hughie, either. He works on my farm.

AHOLIBAH. We both seem to want the same thing, don't we?

NAIN. Isn't that lucky? You can have her back to-night.

AHOLIBAH. Where is she now?

NAIN. Out with Hughie, but Willie Ffoulkes and Modryb Jane have gone after them, and she'll be back presently to be talked to by me.

AHOLIBAH. What have Willie Ffoulkes and Modryb Jane to do with it?

NAIN. They followed to separate them and keep them out of mischief, and you should be careful, Aholibah Jones, of Willie Ffoulkes.

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AHOLIBAH. Who is this Willie Ffoulkes? Living on the mountain road, I never got to know him.

NAIN. A pious man he is with only one daughter of his own, and she as plain to look at as a haystack in the rain, so he watches out after the village to see that no one lives badly, and it's a very good village we have now, but just a bit dull, isn't it?

AHOLIBAH. And why must I be careful of him?

NAIN. He's heard speak of you and your ways and he wants Hughie to marry the girl, so then he won't have to bother his head about what they do or what they don't do, and if he thought there was a chance of taking the girl away from you he'd march her right up to chapel this minute to save her from you.

AHOLIBAH. Is that what he'd do?

NAIN. He would indeed, but I put him off it for a while and told him to send the girl to me. And when she comes back I'm going to tell her things that will . . . Hush! There they are coming this minute. Go back quickly and don't let them see you. A sight of you might change Willie Ffoulkes's mind in a minute.

[She pushes her towards the back door.]

AHOLIBAH. But I borrowed Mrs. Morris', the Bakery's, donkey cart and it's out there on the road.

NAIN. You can go around. Quick now. *(She goes. Nain faces the other door, and Eira, Hughie, and Modryb Jane enter.)* Where's Willie Ffoulkes?

HUGHIE. He's coming, and when he comes we . . .

NAIN. I told him to talk to you. Has he done so?

HUGHIE. Well, you see, it's like this.

NAIN. He hasn't. I can see he hasn't. Go back to him now while I have a chat with the little girl there.

HUGHIE. But listen, I want to . . .

NAIN. Not another word. And will you milk the cows, or have you forgotten them?

HUGHIE. Bobl anwyl! I forgot them.

SKINFLINT

NAIN. Then hurry; and if you can persuade Willie Ffoulkes to help you without his wanting some of the milk for it, do so.

[*Hughie is about to speak, then turns and goes out.*]

EIRA. Hughie!

MODRYB JANE. There's nothing to be frightened of.

NAIN. No, that's right, Modryb Jane. Come here to me, little girl.

EIRA. I don't like you. You wanted Hughie not to marry me.

NAIN. Don't be angry now with an old woman. How old are you?

EIRA. Sixteen.

NAIN. And what is your name?

EIRA. Eira.

NAIN. Eira is it? Eira means "snow."

MODRYB JANE. Isn't it a pretty name, isn't it?

NAIN. A good name. Snow is white and beautiful, but if you breathe on it hard with hot breath it melts and runs away, doesn't it, Eira?

EIRA (*timidly*). Yes, I suppose.

NAIN. Go into the back room, Modryb Jane, and put the potatoes on the boil. And stay and watch them so they won't boil over.

MODRYB JANE. Well, will you let me . . .

NAIN. Modryb Jane, do as I say this minute. And take that old eiderdown with you.

[*Modryb Jane goes.*]

EIRA. You're not going to hurt me.

NAIN. No, of course not.

EIRA. Hughie would be angry with you. He told me so.

NAIN. Are you very fond of Hughie, tell me?

EIRA. Yes. He's the finest, handsomest boy I've ever seen.

NAIN. Are you fond enough of him to stay here always in this place?

EIRA. Yes. I told him so, just now.

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NAIN. It won't be quite what you think it is here.

EIRA. No. He told me you were a bit queer in the head.

NAIN. Did he? (*Changing her tone.*) Tell me this now.

Isn't it just a little afraid you are of living here in this lonely cottage among the trees?

EIRA. It's not very lonely. You can see the village just down there from your garden gate, it's so near.

NAIN. Not at night. You can see nothing at night but the trees moving in the wind against the sky. You hear nothing but the whisper of the wind under the stars or the dripping of the rain from the black branches; or an owl, maybe, crying out from an old pine.

EIRA. Well, isn't it a strange old woman you are! I'm not afraid of trees and rain and owls.

NAIN. Oh, but it's lonely here, and if you lived here always like me you'd become a strange old woman too. Even in the day the trees are alive and the grasses are rustling with no wind to stir them; but at night, when the sun is down, you feel as if everything was looking at you without eyes. And I've thought I've seen faces at the window. (*Eira looks around uneasily. Nain goes on eagerly, pointing with a skinny arm.*) Yes, there at that window. And at the full of the moon you hear voices echoing among the shadows, strange humming, and a queer mocking sound of fiddles.

EIRA (*nervously*). What nonsense! Do you think I'm afraid of you and your silly tales, you crazy old woman, when the whole village laughs at you for them?

NAIN. Yes, they laugh, from a distance, but never at night, or when the moon is high.

EIRA. In bed they are then, and never thinking of old women.

NAIN. In bed they may be indeed, but sometimes they think of old women and close their windows, or make bright fires on their hearths and shiver when a shadow crosses the moon, or the wind wails and the black cat stares into the crackling logs.

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EIRA (*frightened*). What are you talking about?

NAIN. I'm talking about myself. Don't you understand me?

EIRA (*drawing back fearfully*). Oh, you're not a . . .

NAIN (*with a sinister hiss*). Ssh!

EIRA. You're pretending. Hughie would have told me.

NAIN. Hughie doesn't know.

EIRA. I don't believe it. There are no witches now.

NAIN. No? Then maybe you'd believe me if I told you that your stepmother was here with me a little while ago.

EIRA. My stepmother?

NAIN. You didn't know I had the power of summoning people, did you? Go on now. Laugh at me. Call me a crazy old woman. I don't mind.

[*She cackles with laughter.*]

EIRA. She came to fetch me away?

NAIN. That's right.

EIRA. You told her! You sold me back to her!

NAIN. How should I know you belonged to her unless I had the power?

EIRA. Oh, don't send me back to her. Don't send me back to her.

NAIN. Ah, you don't laugh at me any longer.

EIRA. I'm sorry I made fun of you. Will you let me stay? I won't tell a soul what you are. I'll do anything you want me to, but let me stay with Hughie.

NAIN. No.

EIRA. But he wants me.

NAIN. Bewitched he is. Will you do as I tell you or must I scratch your face and leave you with no prettiness to be winning the lads with it?

EIRA (*drawing away with a scream*). No, no. I'll do as you tell me. I could never stand losing my looks. They're all I have in the world.

NAIN. Then listen to what I say. You will go out of the back door, and Modryb Jane will show you the way to the road. (*Calling.*) Modryb Jane! (*To Eira.*)

SKINFLINT

It's getting dark quickly now, but the moon will light your way. Now back you go to Aholibah Jones, and not a word to anyone.

[*Modryb Jane enters.*]

EIRA. Can't I ever see Hughie any more?

NAIN. No, indeed, never again.

EIRA. But I must. He's . . .

NAIN. Yes, yes, I know you're very fond of him, but once and for all, no!

MODRYB JANE. There wasn't any potatoes in the basket, so I put onions on instead.

NAIN. Onions will do. Modryb Jane, will you show Eira the path to the road from the back door. And give her an onion in case it's hungry she is by the time she gets home.

EIRA. I don't want an onion. I want Hughie.

MODRYB JANE. Is she going?

NAIN. Yes, of course she's going.

MODRYB JANE. But listen, you don't . . .

NAIN. Hold your tongue and be off with you. Quick, get her out of the way. I can hear someone coming.

[*Modryb Jane and Eira disappear. Nain pretends unconcern. Aholibah Jones enters, dragging in a sheepish Willie Ffoulkes.*]

AHOLIBAH. You've cheated me, Nain Tan y Grisiau. I could tell by the look in your eye that you'd do it.

NAIN. What do you mean?

AHOLIBAH (*shaking Willie*). He stole Mrs. Morris', the Bakery's, donkey cart that I left out on the road; he and your Modryb Jane.

WILLIE. Well, they stole my pony and trap and went down to the village in it.

NAIN. Will you tell me what you're talking about?

AHOLIBAH. She married him, there in the village chapel, not ten minutes ago.

NAIN (*to Willie*). What? You married Modryb Jane?

WILLIE. No, you old fool. What do you take me for?

SKINFLINT

AHOLIBAH. Your lout of a grandson it was.

NAIN. Hughie?

AHOLIBAH. They got married.

NAIN. Married?

AHOLIBAH. Both of them.

NAIN. They couldn't have. Crazy you are. She was here just now.

AHOLIBAH. Crazy am I? Listen to him, then. Go on. Tell her.

[She pokes Willie viciously.]

WILLIE. They took my pony and trap when I was in here with you.

AHOLIBAH. And *he* took Mrs. Morris', the Bakery's, donkey cart while we were talking together.

[She digs him again.]

WILLIE. And Modryb Jane and I drove after them and got there just in time.

NAIN. In time for what?

WILLIE. In time to see them married. We were the witnesses.

NAIN. You did this to me, Willie Ffoulkes, when I told you what she was! And you saying you'd never let Hughie marry a girl with the eyes of a witch.

WILLIE. I had another look, and the eyes was not so bad.

NAIN. You'll pay for this, Willie Ffoulkes.

AHOLIBAH. And that wasn't the only thing he looked at. He saw the gleam of gold and silver in your precious grandson's hand.

NAIN. Hughie gave you money to deceive me?

WILLIE. Well, he had to have a witness.

AHOLIBAH. And sheep, too. A whole flock of them.

NAIN. Sheep? Have I anything left at all, tell me!

WILLIE. I thought after all it was better for everyone that they should be married.

NAIN. Better for everyone indeed! You hypocrite, and you taking my poor sheep as a bribe.

SKINFLINT

WILLIE. Poor sheep, indeed, they are; but I'm a needy man, and I can't be choosing for myself.

NAIN. I was a fool to trust you when I knew that the sight of a penny would turn you from your promises.

AHOLIBAH. And this is the man who keeps your village out of mischief, is it? A man I find on the road, stealing Mrs. Morris', the Bakery's, donkey cart that she lent me.

WILLIE. Lent you, indeed, you old thief! Haven't I done a good thing saving the slip of a girl from a heathen like you?

AHOLIBAH. I'll see her first before she's saved, my pious Willie Ffoulkes, and maybe when I've finished with her, no one will be wanting to marry her.

NAIN. That's right!

AHOLIBAH (*turning on her*). Hold your tongue! I might have known by the looks of you that you'd have made a muddle of anything you laid your hands on.

[*Enter Hughie with Eira, Modryb Jane following timidly.*]

WILLIE (*pointing*). Look!

AHOLIBAH. Ah, there you are!

HUGHIE. You keep off! She's mine by law now and I'll have them put you in prison if you touch her.

[*He gives Aholibah a push and she sits down and stares at them blankly.*]

NAIN (*sternly*). Modryb Jane, come here! For why did I send you with Willie Ffoulkes?

HUGHIE. You can leave her alone, too. She was one of our witnesses.

NAIN. And you knew all along when I was talking to the girl in this room that they were married?

MODRYB JANE. I tried to tell you. Twice I tried, but you wouldn't let me.

HUGHIE. I tried to tell you, too.

EIRA. So did I.

MODRYB JANE. You never let us finish saying what we began.

SKINFLINT

HUGHIE. Never mind, Modryb Jane, you were a great help to us and we'll reward you for it as soon as we settle down in this house.

NAIN. You won't settle down in my house, I can tell you, and I won't give you a penny, and that old tramp woman there can take her scrubgirl right back to her hovel on the mountain road.

EIRA. If you try to do that to me, I'll tell everyone what you are.

HUGHIE. Yes, indeed, that's right. And grieved I was to hear it, too.

WILLIE }
MODRYB JANE } (*together*). What is she?

EIRA. She's a witch. She told me so herself.

WILLIE }
MODRYB JANE } (*together*). Oh, goodness!

NAIN. You fools! It was a story I made up to frighten her away.

WILLIE. The villagers won't believe that, no, indeed, if we tell them what you are.

MODRYB JANE. No, indeed, they won't.

HUGHIE. Will you let us have the farm now, and I'll be working it just the same as I ever did?

NAIN. No!

HUGHIE. You don't mean that.

NAIN. I mean every word of it. No!

WILLIE. In the old days they used to throw witches into the river from the big rock. If they floated, they were guilty and dragged out and burnt alive.

HUGHIE. That's right.

WILLIE. And if they drowned, innocent they were.

AHOLIBAH. Well, old woman, what do you say to that?

NAIN. They don't do such things these days. I won't give in, I tell you.

AHOLIBAH. Only the other day I heard of a woman they stuck pins into because they thought she might be a witch.

SKINFLINT

HUGHIE. What happened to her?

AHOLIBAH. She died, and they found out afterwards that she was no witch at all.

WILLIE. Well, I'll take six hens and that ham there and twenty golden sovereigns, Nain Tan y Grisiau, and I won't breathe a word to anyone.

AHOLIBAH. And for payment of the wench there, I'll take as much.

HUGHIE. All right. You deserve it. But the rest of the farm belongs to Eira and me.

MODRYB JANE. Wait! Simple in my wits I am, but I can talk with my tongue, too, and I can keep silence if you pay me.

NAIN. You dare do this to me?

MODRYB JANE. Why not?

HUGHIE. She's right. Will you take ten pounds, Modryb Jane?

MODRYB JANE. No. I'll take twenty.

NAIN. Fifteen.

MODRYB JANE. Twenty.

NAIN. Sixteen.

MODRYB JANE. Twenty.

HUGHIE. Let her have twenty. It's a promise, Modryb Jane.

MODRYB JANE. Thank you, Hughie bach.

HUGHIE. It's your right, and you working without wages for years.

MODRYB JANE. There's drink in the back room. May we wish you both happiness?

HUGHIE. Yes, come along. Will you join us, Nain?

NAIN. No!

EIRA } (together). Oh, come along.
WILLIE }

NAIN (*emphatically*). No!!

HUGHIE. Oh, you'll think better of us in time. Come along, Willie Ffoulkes, and you, Aholibah Jones, just for this one night.

SKINFLINT

AHOLIBAH. I'm coming.

[They go into the other room. Modryb Jane is the last. As she goes, Nain calls her back.]

NAIN. Modryb Jane!

MODRYB JANE. Yes?

NAIN. You'll give me every penny of that money the minute they go.

MODRYB JANE *(coming back a step or two)*. But I haven't had it yet.

NAIN. Then you won't take it.

MODRYB JANE. Yes, indeed, I will.

NAIN *(rising and drawing herself up to be her most terrifying)*. Modryb Jane, what are you thinking of to be daring to do such a thing?

MODRYB JANE. I'm thinking of the fine crackling you'll make, Nain Tan y Grisiau, and the flames leaping around you and all the village shouting, and you going up to the sky in smoke.

[She disappears. Nain, completely beaten, sinks back into her chair. The curtain falls.]

THE INN OF RETURN

By

DON C. JONES

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CAST

TRAVERS, *an English novelist of note, who is staying at "Wayside Inn" in hope of gathering some material for a new novel.*

DR. DARBY, *a country doctor with revenge in his heart and sarcasm on his tongue. A bit gray about the temples.*

CHARLIE COOK, *a nervous, sickly looking youth with an overbearing conscience. As clerk of Wayside Inn, he lives in an Inferno of Horrors.*

THE SPINWELL SISTERS, *middle aged, but none the less active. Traveling seems to be their only occupation.*

MURPHY, *an Irishman, of course. A jewel merchant, and an able one. About thirty years old and full of pep.*

RANDALL, *a conscientious young man. Same age as Murphy. He can't quite get over the tragedy of George Mann.*

THE GHOST OF GEORGE MANN, *no spoken lines; but the climax of the play depends on the acting of this character. Make up and sound effects (thunder, lightning, etc.) help to give vivid portrayal.*

SCENE. Wayside Inn, New England.

TIME. The present.

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The curtain rises. Down center is an old fashioned, leather covered arm chair. To the left of it, and slightly upstage, is an equally old fashioned hotel davenport; while left of that, slightly facing a fireplace down left, is a mate to the chair center. Up left is the entrance which leads to the outer hall of the Inn. Up right the stair hall entrance is viewed. Down right is the clerk's desk with all its necessary paraphernalia, such as: key rack, mail rack, vault, office lamp on the desk, and anything else that might generally add to the conglomeration. Up center is a large window which, during the course of the play, displays the storm and the forest beyond in all its wet splendor. The stage is dimly lighted, having only a reading lamp behind the davenport and the lamp on the clerk's desk to serve as illumination. The stage is empty, with the exception of a lone figure seated on the davenport, reading. There is a sharp crackle of thunder, yet this man pays no attention; he is reading his own book! Dr. Darby enters up right in a bathrobe and bedroom slippers. The action starts.

DARBY (*entering up right*). Travers?

TRAVERS. Yes. (*Turning around in the davenport.*)

Oh, hello, Doctor, I didn't recognize your voice at first.
Have a chair.

DARBY. Thanks. (*Sits in chair center.*) Where's Charlie?

TRAVERS. Charlie?

DARBY. Pardon me, Travers, I forgot that you were almost a stranger here. Charlie is the night clerk.

TRAVERS. Oh, yes. He walked out a short while ago. Didn't say where he was going. I say, Doctor, he

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strikes me as being a queer chap. I tried to strike up a conversation before he went out and he did nothing but mumble. I became quite disgusted, if you get what I mean.

DARBY. Your subject must have been quite distasteful.

TRAVERS. Oh, absolutely not. Quite the contrary, I asked him some questions concerning the Inn.

DARBY. Yes, he usually does mumble when it comes to questions concerning the Inn.

TRAVERS. Really? And why?

DARBY. I don't think Charlie is entirely satisfied with his job here.

TRAVERS. Why doesn't he leave?

DARBY. He's planning to, from all I can gather. I don't blame him. This confounded place gives me the jitters. I should be in bed now, but do you think I can sleep?

TRAVERS. Can't you?

DARBY. With the rain running through a half inch hole in the roof?

TRAVERS. Did you say "rain"?

DARBY. One of the worst storms I've seen this year.

TRAVERS. Really, I hadn't noticed.

DARBY. That book must be interesting. Mind if I take a look at it?

[He comes to davenport.]

TRAVERS. Certainly not.

[Hands book to Darby.]

DARBY *(receiving book)*. It's your own book!

TRAVERS. I do write, you know.

DARBY. Yes, I know you're a novelist, but to be so interested in one's own book . . . it's uncanny.

TRAVERS. On the contrary, it becomes deucedly fascinating after the hundredth time through.

DARBY. All of which brings me to an impertinent question I should like to ask you.

TRAVERS. You have my permission.

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DARBY. What is an important English writer doing in a small American country hotel?

TRAVERS. Looking for material, Doctor.

DARBY. A new novel?

TRAVERS (*nodding*). One with an element of mystery, if possible. I've desired for some time to write such a story, but the situation has never arrived. I swore this time, however, not to take my pen in hand until I can grasp the right plot.

DARBY. What would you say if I were able to give you a decidedly unusual plot?

TRAVERS (*in the manner of a knight of old*). I should immediately get down on my knees and beg of you to give me the dope, as you Americans say.

DARBY (*seriously*). That's not necessary, Travers. Would you consider this Inn a setting for a potential plot?

TRAVERS. Why . . .

DARBY. Let me explain. This Inn is enveloped in an antiquated legend, which strange as it may seem, appears to be working out to the *n*th degree.

TRAVERS. Sounds interesting.

DARBY. This hotel has been in the family of Jonathan Adams for at least four generations. When it was finally handed down to Jonathan, the legend found in him its strongest believer.

TRAVERS. But what is the legend?

DARBY. I'm coming to that. The natives in this part of the country call this hotel "The Inn of Return," and here's the reason: in all the years that the Adams family have had this place, no traveler having once been here has ever failed to return for at least a second visit.

TRAVERS. How deucedly queer!

DARBY. It is *that*.

TRAVERS. And how is the legend unwinding during . . . shall we call it Jonathan's administration?

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DARBY. Jonathan is lacking a few return guests, and it worries him.

TRAVERS. But there's still time.

DARBY (*shaking his head*). Not a great deal. Jonathan is eighty-five years old. Aside from that, one of his guests can't return.

TRAVERS. Dead?

DARBY (*nodding "yes"*). Shot! That's part of your plot, Travers.

TRAVERS (*smiling*). I should have my note book.

DARBY. You won't need it. Before you leave this place I daresay you will know as much about this situation as anyone around here.

TRAVERS. And about this murdered chap . . .

DARBY. His name was George Mann, a queer but likable fellow. He had only been here several days when a traveling jewel merchant, name of Murphy, dropped in one stormy night . . . and incidently, he is one of the guests yet to return.

TRAVERS. I say, there are dramatic possibilities in this old place. But go on, your story is becoming very interesting.

DARBY. Well, sir; Murphy, it seems, was carrying an important load of diamonds and had no intention of staying in any such place as this. The storm changed his plans. He left his jewels with Charlie, who put them in the hotel safe. (*Charlie enters up left.*) Here's Charlie. Let's ask him to finish the story. Oh, Charlie!

CHARLIE (*none too pleased*). Something I can do for you, Doctor?

DARBY. Charlie, would you mind retelling the story of that jewel robbery we had two years ago? You see, Charlie, I would tell the story, but it might not be accurate.

[*Charlie takes chair center.*]

CHARLIE (*unwillingly*). Yeah . . . okay, I'll tell about

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it. I can't see why you want that story spilled to every new guest we have here, Doctor. Everybody read about it in the papers.

DARBY. It makes a good subject for conversation, Charlie. Start your story.

CHARLIE. Well, a couple of years ago, on a stormy night; in fact, it was raining just like it is tonight . . .

DARBY. If you will think carefully, Charlie, you will remember that tonight is the second anniversary of that little incident.

CHARLIE (*pause, staring down stage*). That's so, isn't it? Two years . . .

DARBY (*striving to press something from Charlie*). It's etched quite clearly on your mind, isn't it, Charlie?

CHARLIE (*snappingly*). Why shouldn't it be?

DARBY (*shrugging*). No reason at all. In fact, I remember things myself, Charlie. I think we all remember things, different things.

TRAVERS. I say, I'm not hearing my story.

DARBY. A thousand pardons, Travers. Go on, Charlie. You see, Mr. Travers hasn't heard this tale, so you aren't telling the story entirely in vain.

CHARLIE. As I was saying, this all happened on a stormy night a couple of years ago. A traveling jewel agent, fellow named Murphy, stopped here. He couldn't go on because of the storm. He put his jewels in the safe back of the clerk's desk. (*Points to safe.*) There was a fellow staying here at the time, called . . . what was his name, Doctor?

DARBY. You do forget some things, don't you, Charlie? His name was George Mann, remember?

CHARLIE. Yeah, that was his name. Well, anyway, this fellow Mann came downstairs about two o'clock in the morning, stuck a gun on me and ordered me to open the safe.

TRAVERS. And you opened the safe?

CHARLIE (*emphatically*). Of course. What else could I

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do, looking into the barrel of a thirty-two automatic?
DARBY. You even know the caliber of the gun, don't you, Charlie?

CHARLIE. All the details were printed in the "Times."

DARBY. That's right, they were, weren't they? Go on with the story, Charlie.

CHARLIE. That's all. (*Laughingly.*) There isn't any more.

DARBY. Indeed! And what happened to George?
(*Quickly as if to cover something.*) George Mann, I mean.

CHARLIE (*rising quickly*). What are you trying to do to me?

DARBY (*also rises*). Charlie, keep cool. Your weak heart!

CHARLIE. What do you know about my weak heart?
[*He sits in chair center.*]

DARBY. I am a doctor, Charlie. Maybe I should finish the story.

CHARLIE. No! I'll finish. George Mann left the hotel after robbing the jewels. I called the police right after he left. They caught him boarding an east-bound train and they . . . they shot him.

DARBY (*slowly, and half to himself*). In the back!

TRAVERS. Couldn't more human methods than shooting have been used?

DARBY. Charlie warned them that Mann was a desperate criminal.

CHARLIE. How did you know that?

DARBY. The sheriff told me.

TRAVERS. The jewels were returned, I suppose?

DARBY. No, that's a problem that's still baffling.

CHARLIE (*breaking in suddenly*). He undoubtedly sold the stuff along with his gun before he boarded the train. He was no amateur.

DARBY. Indeed, he wasn't; it was a little too much of a job for an amateur to handle, eh, Charlie?

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[*Charlie ignores this last remark as if he had never heard it, rises and walks to the clerk's desk. Travers looks questioningly at Dr. Darby, who returns the look with a smug smile.*

TRAVERS. But the connection (*Darby wrinkles his brow.*) the connection between this jewel robbery, the murder — if I may call it that — and The Inn of Return?

[*Charlie raises his eyes from the desk, his ears intently eager to grasp every morsel of conversation.*

DARBY. Can't you see it? It means that a dead man must return to verify the truth of the legend.

CHARLIE (*suddenly becoming alarmed and alert*). That's impossible!

DARBY. Mr. Cook, I should like very much to spend some evening proving to you, through the medium of medical history, that his returning would not be a lone case. There have been any number of such events. I'll admit, however, that if this were an ordinary situation, the chance should be very slim. *But George Mann has an obligation to fulfill!*

CHARLIE (*seriously*). You're . . . you're crazy. He's been dead for two years.

DARBY. *Exactly two years, Charlie. Wouldn't it be dramatic if he should return on an anniversary? (He rises and walks to window up center, followed by the eyes of Cook and Travers.) A storm is so vengeful. (He turns and faces down stage.) Queer that it should so resemble that storm of exactly two years ago. (He turns again to look outside. A flash of lightning illuminates the window and the forest beyond the window. Then a rumble of thunder is heard.) It's getting worse, too. (He turns and walks toward the clerk's desk.)* Charlie, do you remember the names of the guests who haven't returned for a second time?

CHARLIE. No. (*He tries vainly to concentrate on something on the desk.*)

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DARBY. Then why don't you open this drawer?

[Points to a drawer in clerk's desk.]

CHARLIE. Why?

DARBY. Are you afraid to?

CHARLIE. No, I'm not afraid to.

DARBY. Then open it! *(Charlie looks at Darby awhile, then reaches to key rack and proceeds to remove a key. He puts key in lock of the drawer.)* Your hands are shaking.

CHARLIE. Well, what of it? It's my heart.

DARBY *(closely watches the face of Cook while he unlocks the drawer)*. Yes, I should say your trouble is with the heart.

[Cook raises his head, looks into the eyes of Darby, then pulls open the drawer.]

CHARLIE *(looking in drawer)*. Just a note book.

[He takes it out.]

DARBY. That's all I expected. You see, the names of the return guests are in that note book. Would you mind reading them to me? I left my glasses in my room.

TRAVERS *(rising)*. I say, I'll read them for you.
[Walks to clerk's desk.]

DARBY. Fine! *(Takes book from Charlie and hands it to Travers.)* Let's sit on the davenport . . . more light.

TRAVERS. All right.

[They cross to davenport, left center.]

DARBY *(offering Travers a smoke)*. Cigarette?

TRAVERS. No, I think not; thanks, just the same.

[Darby lights up.]

DARBY. Now, I'm all ready; let's have them.

TRAVERS. Well, the first two names here indicate that they might be sisters: Martha and Dorothy Spinwell.

DARBY *(laughingly)*. Won't they be flustered when they find a famous novelist in the house?

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TRAVERS. Oh, but I say, I'm not going to be here the rest of my life, you know.

DARBY. Of course not, but if you will believe my premonition, they will all return tonight.

TRAVERS. Including George Mann?

DARBY. Not George Mann himself; he's dead. Maybe his ghost, eh?

TRAVERS. I say, you're a queer one.

DARBY. Am I?

TRAVERS. So deucedly queer.

DARBY (*half in a whisper*). Don't think too badly of me now. Perhaps I am partially mad. Everything will be explained later.

TRAVERS. That's good enough for me.

DARBY. Thank you. (*Resuming natural voice.*) And now, who is the next guest on the line of on-comers?

TRAVERS. A man named Ian Kennedy.

DARBY. An actor, or rather a manager of a traveling stock company. He, too, was here the night Mann was killed. I never in my life before saw a man so broken up over the death of a chance acquaintance as he was; but go on, I'm interrupting.

TRAVERS. Not at all; I like to find out about these people. The next name is Murphy. That's the jewel merchant, I imagine?

DARBY. The same. He's a pretty right fellow, too. He told me that he couldn't believe Mann stole those jewels; in fact, the only person that does believe it is Charlie.

CHARLIE (*glancing up from desk*). I've got a right to believe that! I know it's true, and so do the police.

DARBY (*softly*). Of course, Charlie, of course. (*To Travers.*) There is one more guest, and his name is . . . now don't tell me . . . it's Randall, isn't it?

TRAVERS. You're right, Doctor. That makes five of them.

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CHARLIE. You'll never see them.

DARBY. Indeed! Are you forgetting the legend of the Inn?

CHARLIE. Legend be damned! Who believes in that?

DARBY. All of us do; even you, Charlie, but you're afraid to admit it. (*He takes the memo book from Travers, rises and walks to the clerk's desk.*) You can put this back now, Charlie. (*Hands him the book.*) It's valuable; keep good care of it.

[*Charlie puts the book in drawer and locks the drawer. Darby walks to window, up center.*]

TRAVERS. Is it still raining, Doctor?

DARBY. Pouring! There should be some customers tonight. Possibly even . . . return guests, eh Charlie? (*He is about to return to the davenport, when something outside catches his eye.*) There's a car drawing up outside, Charlie. Better go out and give them a hand.

CHARLIE. It's not stopping here.

DARBY (*still looking outside*). No? It seems to be coming into the parking lot. Whoever it is must have been here before . . . appear to know the grounds pretty well. There's a lot of baggage, too. It's your duty to see that they get in all right, Charlie. (*Charlie grabs a slicker hanging back of the clerk's desk, goes to the window up center, looks out, then exits up left.*) Well, Travers, it rather looks as if we're up for the rest of the night. We might as well have a little party! (*Goes to clerk's desk and lifts receiver from phone.*) Hello, operator! Hello, operator! (*To Travers.*) These local operators all sleep like logs; you can't raise them on a bet. (*Into phone.*) Hello? I wish to speak to Ian Kennedy, who resides in the Bayport Hotel, Bayport. No, I don't know the number of the hotel. Will you put that through right away? Thank you. (*Turns to Travers.*) I'm going to ask Kennedy to come up here for the rest of the night. He's just like I

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am; he can't sleep when it's raining. That way, we'll at least have one of the guests returning.

TRAVERS. I say, but won't it be rather hard traveling on a night like this?

DARBY. Bayport's only fifteen or twenty miles from here. I think he'll enjoy coming down. (*Into the phone.*) Hello? Hello, you old rascal. I don't suppose you know who is talking to you? Yeh, it's me all right. What was that? No, I didn't catch your opening performance in Bayport this evening, but I promise I'll be there tomorrow night. In the meantime, Kennedy, how about driving over and spending the night with me? Yes, I have a friend here I should like to have you meet. (*Glances at Travers.*) And then we might put on that little party we've planned so long. Remember? What? Oh, you can take your time. All right then, I'll be seeing you. Fine and dandy! Good bye. [*Hangs receiver on hook.*]

TRAVERS. He's coming?

DARBY. Leaving immediately! I think you'll like him, Travers. He's an excellent actor. Had several chances to hit Broadway, but he just keeps plodding over the country playing Shakespeare. Not much money in it, but he loves it. He's the fellow to have for a friend.

TRAVERS. Most artists are that way, except when crossed.

DARBY. And then they're murderous. (*He walks to fireplace, down left, and stands with his back to the fire.*) Kennedy is like that. (*Pause.*) By the way, Travers, if the rest of these guests *should* return, would you rather remain unIntroduced?

TRAVERS. That would be best. I have come this far, partially incognito. I think it would be better if I stayed that way.

DARBY. I thought so; I don't blame you a bit. I'll see to it that you're just another guest.

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TRAVERS. You're very kind, Doctor.

DARBY. Not at all.

[Travers resumes reading. Charlie enters up left, carrying bags, followed by the Spinwell sisters.]

DOROTHY *(seeing Dr. Darby in front of the fireplace.)*

Why, Dr. Darby! Oh, Martha, look here! *(Points to Darby.)*

MARTHA. Well, forever more!

[They come to him. Charlie goes to desk down right and removes rain coat.]

DARBY *(shaking her hand)*. I'm glad to see you again, Dorothy; and how are you, Martha? *(Shakes hands.)*

I thought you two literally swore you would never stop here again.

MARTHA. Take it from me, Doctor, after what happened the last time we were here, we had no desire to return again.

DOROTHY. But what could we do? We certainly couldn't have gone on!

DARBY. I think you were very wise. Now, if you're only wise enough to get a room that doesn't leak . . .

MARTHA. Oh, my goodness, I guess we're destined to get wet, at any rate. Come on, Dorothy, let's turn in; I'm dead.

DOROTHY. I'm with you there, sister! What rooms have you open, Charlie?

[They go to the clerk's desk.]

CHARLIE. Our best room is number five.

MARTHA. Oh, no, you don't! We're not taking that room. This is the Inn of Return, Charlie. We don't want any ghosts walking into our room in the middle of the night. How about the room we had two years ago: seven?

CHARLIE. You can have that.

DOROTHY. Let's get started, then.

[Charlie takes the bags and key, and he exits up right, followed by the two sisters.]

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DOROTHY. Good night, Doctor.

[*Exits, up right.*]

DARBY. Good night, Dorothy.

MARTHA. See you in the morning.

[*Exits, up right.*]

DARBY. You bet!

[*Pause.*]

TRAVERS (*glancing up from his book, then turning around to see if all have gone*). I say! Why the emphasis on room five?

DARBY. It was Mann's room.

TRAVERS. Oh! Then . . . then these sisters know about it?

DARBY. They were here at the time.

TRAVERS. Then almost all of the people yet to return were here that night two years ago?

DARBY. I was just thinking about that. I am sure that all were here except . . . well, possibly even Randall was here. We'll find that out when he comes.

TRAVERS. You really believe he will come?

DARBY. I don't know what to believe, Travers. Down deep inside of me, I can see all of them trooping in here tonight. And yet, looking at the situation from a practical standpoint, I don't see how such a thing could possibly happen.

TRAVERS. And about Mann's ghost, do you . . .

DARBY. No, no. I said that just for Charlie's benefit, but . . . (*He gazes at the window up center and speaks hauntingly.*) but what if he should . . .

TRAVERS. Oh, come now.

DARBY (*excitedly*). You don't believe me, Travers; you couldn't. But let me tell you this: all those who were here two years ago believe in what I'm trying to struggle against believing, that George Mann will return. (*Charlie enters unnoticed and goes to desk, down right.*) No, you couldn't believe that; you didn't hear him whisper over and over again when he was dying, "God will

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avenge my death." I tell you, Travers, one can't help being frightened by something like that.

TRAVERS. I see. Slowly, but surely, I'm piecing this story together.

CHARLIE (*concentrating on the desk, and suddenly blurt-ing out in a monotone*). He won't come back!

[*Travers and Darby both glance toward the desk, down left.*]

DARBY. What did you say, Charlie?

CHARLIE (*nervously*). I said he won't come back. (*Rises.*) He can't come back! He's dead!

DARBY. Charlie, take it easy. (*Walks to clerk's desk, down left.*) You have a none too good heart, you know. Now, what were you trying to say?

CHARLIE (*sits*). You know what I was talking about.

DARBY. Yes (*Rather flippantly.*) I think I do, Charlie. I think I do. (*He goes to chair, center.*) Well, Travers, my theory is off to a good start. Two of the six have returned; only four more . . .

CHARLIE (*looking up from his desk*). Three more!

DARBY (*whirling to face him*). Oh, then you too have some faith in this return business?

CHARLIE. I said nothing like that.

DARBY. You implied as much.

CHARLIE. I meant it was possible for only three to return.

DARBY (*turning again to face down center*). We shall see, we shall see.

[*There is the sound of an auto horn offstage.*]

TRAVERS. That auto horn!

DARBY. Someone's outside waiting for Charlie to come help . . . Well, why don't you go, Charlie? (*Charlie slowly reaches for his slicker.*) Oh, don't be afraid! When he comes, he won't come in a car; dead people don't drive, you know.

CHARLIE. Oh, shut up!

[*Exits, up left.*]

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TRAVERS. I say . . . !

DARBY. He doesn't like me, Travers. (*Laughs.*) I can't say I blame him.

TRAVERS. I do. I don't know what it is, but something is surely distracting the lad.

DARBY (*slowly and without emphasis*). H'mmmm, yes; it's been that way for two years. (*Travers quickly gives the doctor a puzzled look. The doctor suddenly realizes what he has said.*) I . . . I didn't mean exactly that, Travers. I didn't mean what you're thinking.

TRAVERS. What I am thinking?

DARBY. Oh . . . perhaps you . . . you didn't think what I imagined you would. Forget the whole thing, will you, Travers?

TRAVERS. Yes, surely. (*He turns his head toward the fireplace with a puzzled expression.*)

DARBY. Thank you.

[*Enter Charlie with bags, followed by Murphy, also carrying a bag.*]

MURPHY. Set them here for the moment, Charlie. I just saw another car drive up that you'd better attend to.

[*Charlie puts down the bags, looks at Murphy a moment, then exits up left. Murphy stands gazing at the entrance, then turns down center just in time to meet the gaze of Doctor Darby, who has risen from his chair center. Travers again resumes reading.*]

DARBY. Hello there!

MURPHY (*enthusiastically surprised*). Why, if it isn't good old Doctor Darby! (*Comes down stage and shakes hands with Darby.*) It surely is good to see you.

DARBY. Is it?

MURPHY (*glances into the eyes of Darby, then to the floor*). Let's forget all that. (*Sullenly.*) The Lord knows I wouldn't have stopped here tonight if it weren't for the storm. It's terrible!

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DARBY. The storm or . . . the Inn?

MURPHY. Both. (*Walking to fireplace.*) By George, that fire looks good! Almost any shelter looks good on a night like this. Say, Doctor, what's wrong with Charlie? He used to be so jolly, and cheerful. Now . . . well, he hardly spoke to me; pretended not to know me at first.

DARBY. I know. He's becoming unbearable.

MURPHY. How has Jonathan been doing here lately?

DARBY. He's had more business tonight than he's had for weeks.

MURPHY. Yes? Who else is here? Anybody I might know?

DARBY. The Spinwell sisters drove in just a few minutes ago, not of their own accord, however.

MURPHY. They were here when . . . when it happened, weren't they?

DARBY. Yes.

MURPHY. The old Inn theory seems to be bearing itself out, doesn't it? That makes three of us on deck.

DARBY. And another coming for sure.

MURPHY. That so? Who?

DARBY. Do you remember a fellow named Kennedy?

MURPHY (*musings over the name*). Kennedy? Kennedy? Kennedy? Actor, wasn't he?

DARBY. Yes, an itinerant actor. I 'phoned him earlier in the evening, and he promised me he'd drive down.

MURPHY. But such a night to travel! I hope he doesn't have to go far.

DARBY (*smiling*). I don't think he'll mind the rain, Murphy. In fact, I . . . I think he's rather pleased.

MURPHY (*glances at Darby with a look of bewilderment*). He was a rather queer chap. (*Enter Charlie with Randall.*) Randall! (*Goes to Randall up left and shakes hands.*) So it was you following me for the last twenty-five miles!

[*At the mention of the name Randall, Darby glances*

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toward Travers on the davenport, who puts down his book and holds up four fingers. Darby nods.

RANDALL. Hello, Pat!

MURPHY. You remember Doc Darby, don't you?

[Comes down center with Randall.]

RANDALL. Is he still here?

DARBY *(rising)*. Yes, with one leg in the grave.

RANDALL *(enthusiastically)*. Hello, Doctor! How you doing?

[Charlie takes bags, and goes to clerk's desk, down right.]

MURPHY. You know, Doc, Randall and I have become "bosom buddies" since we met two years ago.

DARBY. That's possible enough. I can think of no time in the history of this Inn when the guests became so friendly toward each other as they did after that tragedy. The sympathetic feeling of those concerned seemed to unite them.

MURPHY. All of which reminds me, Randall: your coming means that all of the dubious guests have arrived.

RANDALL. You mean they're all here? The Spinwell sisters? Kennedy, the actor?

MURPHY. Well, no, Kennedy hasn't arrived yet, but Doc promises he will. All the rest are here, and when Kennedy arrives that will make five of us.

RANDALL *(solemnly)*. Five who saw the sixth put in such a position that he couldn't return. Or . . . can he?
[There is a deathly silence for a moment.]

RANDALL *(slowly and reminiscently)*. What he looked like! He was lying on his back; there was a crowd standing around doing nothing but "Oh"ing and "Ah"ing, and constantly closing in on the corpse. And then, Doctor, I saw you turn over the body. The face was hideous, all covered with blood from the mouth. I remember you pulling up his coat collar, so the rest of us couldn't see his face. A woman fainted.

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CHARLIE (*hysterically*). Please! For God's sake, don't talk about it!

RANDALL (*softly*). All right, Charlie.

DARBY (*with a note of sarcasm*). It's his heart; he can't stand much conversation on that subject.

MURPHY. Let's change it.

RANDALL. I'm agreed. (*Pause.*) But speaking of my following you, Murphy, reminds me of something that happened to me that appeared to be rather strange.

MURPHY. Yes? What was it?

[*Goes to chair down left, by fireplace.*]

RANDALL (*sitting on left side of davenport, opposite Travers*). There was a car following me also. Sometimes it was right behind me, and then it would drop back for a distance of say . . . five hundred feet.

MURPHY. And that's queer?

RANDALL. Oh, but wait! About a mile from here, that car completely disappeared.

MURPHY. Possibly turned into a crossroad.

RANDALL. No, that's what's funny. There was no crossroad; I'm positive of that.

MURPHY. He might have stopped and turned off his lights.

DARBY. Do you think that's logical, on a night like this?

MURPHY. No, it isn't. Unless he had car trouble.

RANDALL. That isn't what startled me so much as did the man driving.

DARBY. Drunk?

RANDALL. Oh, no, nothing like that; it was his looks. Just before the car disappeared from my view, he turned off his lights. At the same time I glanced up in the mirror and . . . saw him lighting a cigarette. The match illuminated his face; only once before have I ever seen a face anywhere near as hideous as that was. It . . . it wasn't human.

DARBY (*with a fixed expression*). I think we're going to have a sixth guest tonight . . . a return guest.

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CHARLIE. You're wrong! It can't be him!

MURPHY (*turning around to face Charlie, at the desk*).
Who?

CHARLIE. You know who I mean. Such things don't happen.

[*Murphy looks at him for a moment, then shrugs and turns around. Darby rises and goes to window, up center.*

DARBY (*talking with his back to the audience*). They say history repeats itself. It's surely doing just that tonight. This is an identical storm to the one exactly two years ago. (*A flash of lightning illuminates the forest in the background.*) Randall! Murphy! Come here a moment! (*They rise and go up center with Dr. Darby.*) Look down the road! See anything?

MURPHY. I can't.

RANDALL. I can't either. (*The lightning flashes a little.*) I *can* see something . . . a figure walking alone . . .

MURPHY. I saw it too. Did you notice *how* he was walking? Not like a human would walk in a storm like this! He's walking as if it were a bright Sunday afternoon.

DARBY. He's turning in here.

CHARLIE (*rushes to window*). Oh, God, it can't be!

MURPHY. He's surely coming fast, for the slow steps he's taking.

[*Charlie turns and starts up right.*

DARBY. Charlie, where you going?

CHARLIE. I'm going to get my bag. I'm getting out. I can't stand it any longer. (*Exits up right. Off-stage.*) I can't stand it any longer.

[*Travers puts down his book, rises, and walks up center.*

TRAVERS. I say, Doctor, what's happening?

DARBY. He's coming in. He mustn't know we're all watching him. Let's get back to where we were sitting.

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[They all take the places they formerly had.]

RANDALL (*with a rasping throat*). I was a fool to come here tonight.

[There is a terrific flash of lightning, followed shortly by an equally terrific rumble of thunder. Steps are heard in the hall. Then in the partially dark entrance up left a lone figure presents himself. He is wearing an old black topcoat, the collar closely drawn around his neck. The brim of his hat is drawn down, covering the upper portion of his face, but the LOWER PORTION! . . . IT'S HIDEOUS! His face is a deathly white, except for the appearance of dried blood around the mouth and collar. He stands in the doorway a moment, none of the men seated down stage daring to look back. With noiseless steps, this ghastly creature crosses to the clerk's desk down left, goes behind it, and picks the number five key from the rack. Then, as quietly as he entered, he exits up right. There is a pause.]

DARBY (*nervously*). Well?

MURPHY. It was he.

RANDALL. This isn't possible.

DARBY. Did you notice his getting the number five key?
There's no mistake.

MURPHY. I can't believe it. I won't believe it.

[Pause. Charlie rushes in carrying his bag. He is completely out of breath.]

CHARLIE (*frantically*). I saw him! I saw him!

DARBY (*rising quickly, and grabbing Charlie by the arm*).
Sit down and calm yourself.

CHARLIE. I can't. I'm getting out of here. Let go of my arm!

DARBY (*forcing him into the chair center*). Now listen, Charlie, you're dreaming. You said yourself that it was impossible for him to return.

CHARLIE. Let me go, you fool! You can stay here if you want. I'm getting out. He's up in his old room now.

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DARBY. What if he should be? What are *you* afraid of?
George Mann is dead. It's only your conscience that's making him live.

CHARLIE. Conscience? I didn't steal 'em.

DARBY. No?

CHARLIE (*hysterically, just as the figure enters, up right*).

Oh, God, let me go! Let me go! Let me go!

DARBY (*as the figure slowly draws nearer*). It is George Mann. Only he's dead. . . .

CHARLIE (*dropping to the floor, and clutching the knees of Dr. Darby. He sobs*). I stole them! I stole them! I stole them! Don't let him come any nearer! He'll kill me. He wants revenge. Tell him I'm guilty. Tell the whole world I'm guilty. But don't let him . . .

[*He chokes, and drops to the floor. The doctor is immediately down on his knees examining the prostrate form. Everything is quiet; even the figure has stopped moving.*]

DARBY (*softly and slowly*). He's dead. Heart failure.

(*Slowly all rise except the doctor, who is still on his knees.*) God has avenged the death of George Mann.

(*To the figure.*) Kennedy, you played your greatest rôle tonight. (*All start at the mention of the figure being Kennedy.*) Travers, (*The doctor rises.*) that's your story.

TRAVERS (*slowly shaking his bowed head*). I shall never write it! Never!

Curtain

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

By

ANN SEYMOUR

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Prevention of Lynching, Atlanta, Georgia.

CAST

AUNT DOADY, *an old negro woman.*

JIM, *her grandson.*

FRUIT CAKE, *negro boy about six years old.*

EPSIE LEE, *girl whom Jim is going to marry.*

LUCY, *Fruit Cake's mother.*

MILES CHAMBERS

TOM MOORE } *white men.*

MAN

MINOR NEGRO CHARACTERS.

SCENE. Southern negro cabin.

TIME. The present.

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

The scene is laid in front of a negro cabin. The door is open, as is the one window. Through the door can be seen a table with a lamp on it; and through the window, a bed. Outside it is bright moonlight. To the right, under the window is a wash bench with wash pan, bucket and dipper, and fruit jar with some cyanide in the bottom of it. There is a small wood-pile to the extreme left and a wash pot down stage at the right. A cane-bottom chair leans against the house. The only lights are the yellow light of the lamp and the moonlight.

Aunt Doady, an old negro woman, is sitting on the door-step, leaning forward, elbows resting on knees. Her black, wrinkled face has the rather mournful tranquillity found on so many black faces: a calm acceptance of fate.

The night is very still until from the shadowy woods close by a whippoorwill calls plaintively.

The dialect is only suggested. The voices are soft and melodious, and the vowels are much plainer than the consonants.

AUNT DOADY. Listen to dat bird! Soun' lak he heart done broke in two. (*The whippoorwill calls again.*) What de mattah, whippoorwill? Why you cryin', hunh? Is youah wife done gone and left you, or is you jus' lone-some cause you ain' got no wife? Ain' no use takin' on lak dat.

[A little negro boy runs on the stage. He has been running hard and is panting so that he finds it hard to speak. Aunt Doady peers at him.]

AUNT DOADY. Is dat you, Fruit Cake?

FRUIT CAKE. Yes'm, Aunt Doady, I jus' been . . .

AUNT DOADY. Wheah's youah ma?

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FRUIT CAKE. She's a-comin' up de road. I took a short cut through de woods an' when . . .

AUNT DOADY. Who with yo' ma?

FRUIT CAKE. Epsie Lee, pappy an' 'em. Dey's goin' to church, and when I gits to dat ole dead tree stump down in de slough, ole screech owl a-settin' up dere, jus' yell lak evahthing. Hit scah me an' I run as hahd as I kin. Bet I was goin' fastah'n anything. Bet I was goin' fastah'n ole win' could go.

AUNT DOADY. Boy, how many times dat owl screech?

FRUIT CAKE. T'ree times, Aunt Doady.

AUNT DOADY. Is you suah?

FRUIT CAKE. Yes'm, I'se suah! T'ree times, jes' lak dis: Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

AUNT DOADY. Hush yo' mouf! Dat's soun' I doan lak. Screech owl mean death. Fruit Cake, you ain't got no business comin' through dem woods. Ef'n you hadn', you wouldn' a heard no screech owl.

[From offstage at the right comes the sound of voices of negroes, laughing and calling to each other, walking down the moonlit road to church. Epsie Lee, a young negro girl, finely built, with an intelligent, sympathetic face, enters a little ahead of the others. Lucy, Fruit Cake's mother, follows closely. She is good natured and lazy, with an ever ready laugh. Three men and two other women complete the group. They seat themselves easily about the stage, Lucy dropping on the wash bench at the right. One of the men sits on the ground and leans against the wash bench, another sits on the wood pile at extreme left and faces the house; the other man leans against the house in a cane-bottom chair, just to the left of an overturned box where one of the women sits. As they come in, they call greetings to Aunt Doady.]

ALL. Good evening, Aunt Doady!

AUNT DOADY. I'se fine. How's you dis evenin'?

EPSIE LEE (*going toward the doorstep where Aunt*

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

Doady sits). M'hunh, cotch you a talkin' to youah-self, didn' we, Aunt Doady? Mighty good sign you's gittin' old.

AUNT DOADY. What if I does talk to myself? I'se suah somebody's listenin' den, and dat's mo' dan I kin say 'ef'n I talks to somebody else. But I'se been talkin' to Fruit Cake.

LUCY. He been heah, has he? I been wonderin' wheah dat chile shisted off to.

AUNT DOADY. He were heah jus' a moment ago. Fruit Cake, wheah you go? (*Fruit Cake, who hid in the wash pot when he first heard the voices, pops up his grinning head.*) Git outa dat wash pot fo' I skin you. Lawd! You so black I cain' tell wheah you staht an' de wash pot leave off.

FRUIT CAKE (*hops out*). Aunt Doady, why I so black anyhow?

EPSIE LEE (*chanting*).

God made de dahkey
Made him in de night
Made him in a hurry
And fo'got to paint him white!

Dat's what Aunt Doady use to tell me an' Jim. Who learn it to you, Aunt Doady?

AUNT DOADY. My ole mammy learn it to me. Dunno wheah she got it.

FRUIT CAKE. "God made de dahkey." What come nex', Epsie Lee?

EPSIE LEE. "Made him in de night."

FRUIT CAKE. "God made de dahkey,
Made him in de night."

EPSIE LEE. "Made him in a hurry
And fo'got to paint him white!"

FRUIT CAKE. "Made him in a hurry
And fo'got to paint him white!"

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

LUCY. Night lak dis make me jes' want to sit an' sit.

AUNT DOADY. Seem lak any kin' night make you wan' to sit. Any kin' day, too.

LUCY (*she laughs with the others*). Reck'n you's right about dat. But when I knows I oughta be up an' doin' sumpin', seem lak I cain' jus' sit without worryin' a mite.

LUCY'S HUSBAND. Worryin' ain't gonna tiah you out none.

EPSIE LEE. Look, ol' moon done got hisself hung in a tree.

FRUIT CAKE. Wan' a drink.

LUCY. Go lif' dat dippah an' git one den.

[*Fruit Cake goes to wash bench and gets a drink of water. After he drinks, he picks up the fruit jar on the bench.*]

AUNT DOADY. Fruit Cake, put dat jah down! Take yo' han's of'n it, I say. Hit's pizen!

FRUIT CAKE. Pizen? Why's it pizen, Aunt Doady?

LUCY. Git away from dere, Fruit Cake! Does you wan' to drop daid?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. Lucy, ain' dat chile got anuthah name?

LUCY (*laughs*). Lawd, I doan know. Fruit Cake, is you got anuthah name?

FRUIT CAKE. No'm, jes' Fruit Cake.

AUNT DOADY. Humph! Doan even know whethah youah own youngun got anuthah name.

LUCY. Reck'n we kinda run out when he come along. Aunt Doady, what you got pizen in dat jah for?

AUNT DOADY. Dat's wheah Jim keep he buttahflies and bugs. He jes' drop 'em in an' hit doan huht none. Dey jes' sorta goes to sleep.

EPSIE LEE. Jim, he couldn' stan' to huht nothin', not even a little bug.

ONE OF THE MEN. Mighty funny work fo' a man, catchin' 'em buttahflies.

ANOTHER. You ain' gonna catch dat Jim doin' no man's

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

wuhk. He doan lak dat plowin' an' choppin' cotton.
No suh! He gotta catch hisself some buttahflies.

EPSIE LEE (*heatedly*). Jim jus' smart, dat's all. He make a whole lot more money catchin' buttahflies an' sellin' 'em to Professah Brown, dan you does, Reely Watson.

AUNT DOADY. Hit's what he laks to do. Ef'n he'd ruthah catch bugs dan chop cotton, dat's he business, I reck'n. Evahbody be a sight happier ef'n he doin' what he laks.

REELY. What dey do with bugs, anyhow? Wish dey'd come and git some dem boll weevils off'n my cotton.

EPSIE LEE. Jim say Professah Brown stick pins in 'em and put 'em on a card. Dey use 'em in dey studies at de college.

REELY. Still say hit's funny wuhk fo' a man!

EPSIE LEE. I ain' nevah notice you collapsin' from too much work!

REELY. Anyway ef'n I had a gran'son . . .

AUNT DOADY. Well, you ain' got one yet, an' Lawd pity him does you evah have one!

LUCY. Hol' youah mouths, all of you. Epsie Lee, sing somethin' fo' us: "Dat's Why Darkeys Were Born."

AUNT DOADY. Dat's white folks' song. Sing "The Old Hen Cackle."

[Epsie Lee smiles and starts the familiar old song, moving down stage toward the wash pot. The other darkeys join in. Gradually they get up, and in response to the lively tune, that works into organic melody the notes of the hen cackling, pat their feet and sway their bodies. As the music grows faster, Fruit Cake breaks into a cake walk.]

THE OLD HEN CACKLE

The old hen she cackle, she cackle in the corn;
The next time she cackle, she cackle in the barn.

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

CHORUS.

Well, the old hen she cackle, she sholy gwain to lay.

The old hen she cackle, she cackle in the loft;
The next time she cackle, she cackle further off.

CHORUS.

Well, the old hen she cackle, she sholy must-a laid.

The old hen she cackle, she cackle in the lot;
Well, the next time she cackle, she'll cackle in the pot.

CHORUS.

The old hen she cackle, well, she sholy ought to lay.

[At last, Lucy, the only one, besides Aunt Doady, who has remained seated, rises and interrupts the merriment.]

LUCY. It's time we git to church, ef'n dey's gonna be any.

AUNT DOADY. You's powerful late gittin' dere.

LUCY. Brothah Hawkins went ovah to Stormy Hill fo' a funeral, so church is late tonight. Bettah come along with us.

AUNT DOADY. Nope. I'se too old fo' dat shoutin' religion now. When you gits as old as I is, an' has known God as long as I has, you doan have to go to church; you can jes' set on youah do'step an' talk to Him. You doan have to say words even. He jus' sorta knows what's on youah min'.

REELY (*facetiously*). Wish I knowed I stood in with de Lawd lak dat.

LUCY. Ef'n you'd been as good as Aunt Doady all youah life, you wouldn't have to worry no more than she do.

REELY. I vow Aunt Doady's a good woman all right. I ain' nevah knowed her to do nothin' that wasn't right, 'cept run off at de mouth powerful hahd.

EPSIE LEE. Sometime I think Aunt Doady ain' quite lak de res' of us. She's mo' lak a saint, dat's what!

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

AUNT DOADY. Git out! Doan be makin' no saint out of me. It's jus' dat I'se lived my life, an' it's been a long one, an' in all dose yeahs I'se known de Lawd an' He's known me. We jus' undahstan's each othah, dat's all. I ain' nevah stole, no' lied no mo' that I had to, nor killed nobody. I'se kept as right as I could. And now dat I'se almost ready to go, I feels kinda peaceful lak — without nothin' to worry about.

LUCY. Come on, or we's gonna be late fo' meetin' sho.

[Epsie Lee lags behind, as the others call good-byes and start off the stage at left.]

EPSIE LEE. Aunt Doady, ain' Jim comin' to church to-night?

AUNT DOADY. I'se jus' wonderin' wheah Jim at. He stay gone mos' all day, catchin' bugs. Den, dis evenin' jus' befo' suppah time, he go down to de Crossroad Store, an' he ain' come back yet. *(Aunt Doady gets up very slowly and walks to the right as though she is looking down the road.)* I put his tuhnip greens and cawn bread on the back of de stove to wahm, but de stove gonna be stone cold fo' he gits heah, ef'n he doan hurry.

[Epsie Lee follows her and then turns and goes to the left as she talks. Aunt Doady, listening to her, moves back to the wash bench, gets a drink of water, and then goes to the wood pile, and gathers a few chips, which she drops in her apron.]

EPSIE LEE. You know, Aunt Doady, it's funny how folks think Jim is lazy and sorta queer 'cause he doan git out and chop cotton or plow lak all de rest ob 'em does. Dere ain' a lazy bone in Jim's body. Us two, we know him; we's de only two what does, I reck'n. Jim, he's jus' different from de othah niggehs aroun' heah, dat's all. He stay in de woods cause he lak 'em. He lak de stillness, de trees, all de birds an' frogs. An' he learn me to like 'em too. I lissen to old bull bats all my life; but one evenin' Jim and me was watchin' 'em swoop around, and hollerin' ovah de lake, an' somehow, jus' de way Jim

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stood so still-like, a-lookin' at 'em, made me see 'em different; I doan know how. Now I allus gits a little shivery when I sees 'em, jus' lak I does when I sees de mist rise off de lake about sun-up, or de first dogwood in de spring, or heahs a mocking bird singing jus' like he gonna bus' hisself wide open!

AUNT DOADY. Yessuh, Epsie Lee, dere's a whole lot out dere (*She gestures vaguely toward the woods.*) ef'n you can jus' stop to see it or lissen to it. Jim, he know how to do it.

[*From a distance Lucy calls Epsie Lee's name.*]

EPSIE LEE. I'se comin'. Good night, Aunt Doady. See you in de mawnin'!

AUNT DOADY. Good night, Epsie Lee. Jim got hisself a mighty fine gal. (*Epsie Lee goes off, left, and Aunt Doady gathers chips. The whippoorwill calls, startlingly close.*) Still grievin', is you? Body'd think you was mou'nin' fo' de whole worl'. (*She stops suddenly and peers to the right.*) What's dat? Who dat out there?

[*Jim, a young negro, comes from the right hurriedly. He is nervous; but even the terror which he tries to hide cannot take away the simplicity and fineness that are naturally his. He tries to assume an air of indifference, even swaggering a little.*]

JIM. It's me, Aunt Doady.

AUNT DOADY. How come you slip through de woods lak dat? You scah a body to death! I been listenin' fo' youah whistle fo' an houh. Come on while I gits youah suppah out fo' you.

JIM. No'm, I don' want it. I ain' got time!

AUNT DOADY. Ain't got time? (*She goes toward him and looks at him closely. His eyes evade hers.*) Fo' why? What you gotta do? Wheah's you goin'? What's de mattah with you, Jim? You's powerful jumpy.

JIM. Ain' a thing, Aunt Doady. Honest!

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AUNT DOADY. What you listenin' to?

[Dogs bark in the distance. At the sound, Aunt Doady lets the chips drop from her lap, and stands still, suddenly fearful.]

AUNT DOADY. Ain' dem dawgs I heah?

JIM. Yes'm, reck'n so. Maybe deys coon dawgs. Somebody huntin' coons, I reck'n, or maybe deys fox houn's. White folks is a huntin' fox. Good night fo' fox huntin'. Scent easy to pick up.

[The sound of the barking dogs grows louder.]

AUNT DOADY. Are you suah dem's fox houn's, Jim? *(Aunt Doady's voice is ominous.)* Jim! Look at me! Dem ain' fox houn's; dem's blood houn's! Gawd! I cain' nebah fo'git dat soun'! De night dey come an' got yo' pappy. You could heah dem blood houn's, gittin' closuh, and closuh, an' closuh all de time. An' yo' pappy, he was gray as a grave stone. He didn't know what to do, wheah to go, thinkin' dey couldn' fin' him in de lof'. But when white folks staht out lynchin', dey ain' no hidin', no runnin', no talkin' 'em out of it. Dey go up, and dey drag him out, an' he scream! Gawd! I cain' nevah fo'git his screams! *(She is living again the terrible night when her son had been taken by a mob and lynched.)* Dey didn' say much. None o' 'em did, an' dey wouldn' let us. Dey tie him onto a horse an' drag him, drag him ovah de groun', ovah de rocks and weeds. Den dey hang him to a tree an' dey shot him, shot him plum full o' holes! An' dey wouldn' let me or youah mammy go neah him! Dey wouldn' let us take him down! We, we could see him up dere, dangling . . .

JIM. For God's sake, Aunt Doady, stop!

AUNT DOADY *(brokenly)*. Jim, baby. Aunt Doady's sorry! Only I wakes up at night sometime an' I heahs him sayin', "I didn' mean to kill him, I jus' twisted he gun, so he wouldn' shoot me!" An' he wouldn', Jim. Youah pappy wouldn' ha haht nothin'! But de white folks, dey didn' know dat . . .

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JIM. I tell you, I can't stand it!

AUNT DOADY. Jim, who dey aftah, dem blood houn's?

(Jim stares at her and the truth finally dawns on her.)

Dey's aftah you!

JIM. I ain' done nothin'! I sweahs I ain'! *(They listen fearfully to the distant barking of the dogs.)* I was comin' along de road from de sto' when I sees Mr. Watkins a layin' in a little huddle ovah to one side. I went ovah to him, an' he was bleedin'. He'd been shot. I stahted runnin' off to git help an' a cah full of white men drove up an' see me a runnin off, an' dey take in aftah me. I knowed den dey think I done it an' it scah me, Aunt Doady. It scah me so I didn' know what I'se doin', so I jus' go fastah'n evah! I heahs one of 'em yell, "Catch him!" An' anothah one say, "Who was it?" An' somebody else say, "I doan know what niggeh it was!"

AUNT DOADY. Why didn' you stop an' tell 'em you ain' done nothin'?

JIM. I'se scahed, I tell you! I couldn' think. I couldn' do nothin' but run! I lights out to'd de ribbah bottom an' dey chases me. Dey almos' had me once. I'se hidin' hin' a little holly tree, an' dey was as close as you is to me now, so close I could ha' teched 'em. I couldn' even breathe. I heahs one of 'em say he'll go git de sheriff an' blood houn's. I waits till dey leaves an' den I wades across de ribbah wheah it's shallow, so's dey cain't fin' my trail.

AUNT DOADY. Jim baby, you's all wet!

JIM. Ef'n I hurries, mebbe I kin make it to de Louisiana bordah. I'll stay till dey fin's who done it. I ain' gonna face 'em now, Aunt Doady, I cain't!

AUNT DOADY. Yes, I knows, son. I rembah youah pappy. He couldn' 'splain, he couldn' hide. Heah, go roun' an' look undah dat rock by de hen house doah. I done put a li'l buryin' money in a can dere. You take 'em. Spec you'll need 'em in Louisiana.

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JIM. Thanks, Aunt Doady! I oughta git a lettah from Professah Brown with some money fo' de bugs nex' week. You jes open it an' keep dat.

AUNT DOADY. I go in an' fix a cup of coffee for you. You gonna need it.

[Jim goes around the house to the back and Aunt Doady goes inside. You can hear her mumbling to herself as she warms the coffee and pours it in a cup. The dogs get closer. She comes to the door and listens; then gets the cup of coffee and brings it outside.]

JIM (coming around the house). I foun' it. I kin cut through.

AUNT DOADY (listening). Jim, dey's ovah dere too. Dey's split de pack! Listen to 'em, ovah dere, and ovah youndah. Dey musta foun' out it was you, an' now dey's all aroun', and gittin' closeh.

[They look at each other in terror.]

JIM. I gotta git out! I gotta hurry! I gotta make it!

AUNT DOADY. No, Jim! You cain' nevah git away from 'em! You cain' nevah now. Heah, run to de shed room an' git de shot gun! *(He disappears into the house.)* God, dey cain't take my Jim! Dey cain't drag him ovah de rocks and weeds, drag him till he's skinned an' bleedin', hang him, put a rope aroun' his neck and pull it till dey ain' no life lef' in 'em, see him danglin' from a tree! Jim, what's so gentle he wouldn' even huht a buttahfly! *(When she says "buttahfly," she stands stock still, struck by a sudden thought. Then she moves slowly toward the wash bench and fearfully picks up the fruit jar containing cyanide. She puts it down quickly, but the dogs sound closer than ever; so hurriedly she takes the lid off the jar, empties some of the cyanide into the coffee and replaces the jar on the bench.)* Lawd, he say it doan huht de li'l wil' things. They just takes a sniff an' goes to sleep. Dey doan evah know what happen to 'em. But ef'n I gives him pizen, I kills him. I kills him myself. Blood on my soul! . . . An' ef'n I doan, dey git

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him. Dey drag him, dey hang him from a lim'. I goes to Hell, Lawd, not Jim, not Jim!

[Jim returns carrying the gun.]

AUNT DOADY. Jim baby, you knows Aunt Doady loves you, doan you, son?

JIM. 'Cose I does, Aunt Doady. Why you ask dat? You been both mammy and pappy to me.

AUNT DOADY. Epsie Lee, she heah dis evenin'.

JIM. You tell Epsie Lee, Aunt Doady, tell huh why I didn' see huh befo' I lef', tell huh I be back fo' long.

AUNT DOADY. Sho, baby, you be back fo' long.

JIM. Lissen! Dey's comin' closuh! Dey's heah almos'. I'se goin', Aunt Doady. I'se gotta go!

AUNT DOADY (*talking almost to herself*). Hit's a terrible thing I'se doin'. De pearly gates is gittin' dimmah an' dimmah, furdah an' furdah away. But I'se got to! I'se got to do it fo' Jim!

JIM. What you say, Aunt Doady?

AUNT DOADY (*hands him the coffee*). Heah. Drink it down. It ain' so hot now. Drink it all at once!

[Aunt Doady, with horror and misery written on her black face, watches him take a huge gulp of coffee, seeming to swallow most of it at once. He gasps and chokes.]

JIM. It tastes funny. Aunt Doady, I'se . . . sick.

AUNT DOADY. Hit's cause you'se upset an' nervous, Jim. Heah, come in an' lie down a minute fo' you goes.

[Jim staggers into the house and drops on the bed. Aunt Doady stands in the door, stunned, looking at him. Then she moves the lamp to a table near the narrow bed so that the lamplight shines on him. You can see his body stretched out on the bed, through the window. She comes back to the door and drops on the doorstep. Her face is tragic in the realization of what she has done.]

AUNT DOADY. Lawd, I wondah, does you undahstan' . . .

[The dogs are in the woods near at hand now and men are heard, trying to quiet them. One voice is heard above the others.]

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VOICE. Circle the house and see that he don't slip out!

[*Two men enter from the right. Tom Moore is a stalwart, slow-moving, slow-talking man. Miles Chambers is a younger man, thoughtless and arrogant.*]

TOM MOORE. Good evening, Aunt Doady.

AUNT DOADY (*answering as though she is in a stupor*).

Awright, thank you. How's you?

TOM MOORE. Is Jim here?

AUNT DOADY. Yessuh, Jim's heah.

MILES CHAMBERS. Well, tell him to get himself out here and not try any funny business, or else he'll wish he hadn't.

AUNT DOADY. Musta been youah dogs I heahd bahkin' ovah dere. Is you been coon huntin'?

MILES CHAMBERS (*facetiously*). Oh, we're hunting coon right enough.

TOM MOORE. Aunt Doady, Jim just killed a white man and we're here to get him. You can't let niggers get away with things like that, and you'd better tell him not to try to run.

AUNT DOADY. No, suh, Mr. Moore, he won't run away.

MILES CHAMBERS. Well, stop palaverin' and tell us where he is.

[*He grabs Aunt Doady's shoulder and shakes her.*]

TOM MOORE. Cut it out, Miles. Aunt Doady ain't done nothing.

MILES CHAMBERS. You've got to put the fear of God in these damn niggers or they'll take the country. Where is he?

AUNT DOADY (*pointing to window*). Dere he is. He's daid.

MILES CHAMBERS. Well, I'll be a . . .

[*A man enters from the left. He has been running.*]

MAN. Tom, you haven't done nothin' yet, have you?

TOM MOORE. No, why?

MAN. You're on the wrong track! Jim didn't do it. Henry Watts' brother-in-law killed him. He went over

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to the county seat and turned himself in. The sheriff caught us at the Catfish Bridge.

TOM MOORE. His brother-in-law! Well! They've been on bad terms for years.

MILES CHAMBERS. Well, old Jim here kicked the bucket before we got him anyway. Couldn't lynch a dead nigger.

TOM MOORE. Shut up, Miles! We're sorry, Aunt Doady. We shouldn't have bothered you. I feel kinda bad about Jim. He allus seemed like a good nigger. He musta had a bad heart.

[The men, greatly subdued, go quietly and rather awkwardly off the stage. Aunt Doady's face is pitiful to see as she realizes she has needlessly given him poison.]

AUNT DOADY. Dey wouldn' a took him. Dey wouldn' ha' took him. Lawd, you gotta undahstan'. I didn' know it. I thought dey kill him. I thought dey hang 'em up on a tree lak dey done his pappy. Jesus, I done kill my own gran'son. De owl he hoot t'ree times! Wish it ud been me, Lawd, 'stead uh Jim!

[Epsie Lee runs in from the left.]

EPSIE LEE. It ain' so, Aunt Doady. Jim ain' dead. Men down de road say Jim dead. Wheah is he, Aunt Doady?

AUNT DOADY (*motions toward window*). Dere he is.

EPSIE LEE. Oh, Lawd!

[Epsie Lee goes into the house. You can see her standing, looking at Jim for a few moments. Then she drops to her knees and sobs.]

AUNT DOADY. He was standin' right dere talkin' to me jus' a moment ago. An' now he's gone. He ain' heah. I won' nevah heah him come whistlin' home in de evenin'. His cawn bread an' tuhnip greens is still a settin' on de back uh de stove a waitin' for 'em jus' wheah I put 'em myself. Oh, God! Ef'n he could only git up and eat 'em! Dere's all his bugs jes' lak he lef' 'em. Ef'n it hadn' been fo' de bugs, I never would a thought uh de



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jah! Ef'n I only hadn' . . . God, I wondah why us has to do such things! I lose my Jim . . . Won' nevah know peace no mo'.

[The whippoorwill calls, low and mournfully. Lucy and the other negroes come from the left. They are silent and sympathetic. Lucy goes to Aunt Doady. The others stand about looking in the window, saying nothing. Fruit Cake stays close to his mother, his eyes round with wonder and fear.]

LUCY. Dere, Aunt Doady. Doan look lak dat. Ef'n you could jus' break down, you feel so much bettah. What happen', Aunt Doady? I see 'em dis mawnin' an' he look jes' es peart, goin' along whis'lin'.

AUNT DOADY (*unaware that anyone has spoken to her*). He was funny li'l boy. He wa'n't no mo' dan seben when he went out an' catch a fish. He brung him home, dip him in cawn meal, an' fry 'em, jes' so he could surprise me. Bless his haht! He done fo'got to take de fish's insides out . . . An' he brung me a new cap jes' las' week. Epsie Lee! Come heah!

[Lucy calls to Epsie Lee and the girl comes out. She drops to the ground and puts her head in Aunt Doady's lap.]

AUNT DOADY. He say he sorry he couldn't see you fo' he lef' . . . (*After a moment's silence.*) You'se jus' gonna miss him . . . Fo' God! Wish dat's all my mournin' gonna be!

EPSIE LEE. Ain' it cruel, Aunt Doady? Ain' death cruel?

AUNT DOADY. They's things crueller than death, Epsie Lee. They's things crueller than death.

[The other negroes start singing very low at first, gradually growing louder, the weird old song, "What is Dis?"]

What is dis dat steals, dat steals

Across my brow?

Is it death? Is it death?

What is dis dat steals

LAWD, DOES YOU UNDAHSTAN'?

My breath away?
Is it death? Is it death?

CHORUS.

If dis is death, I soon shall be
From ebry pain an' trouble free.
I shall the King of Glory see,
All is well. All is well!

What is dis dat make, dat make
My pulse beat feeble and slow?
Is it death? Is it death?
What is dis dat creeps, dat creeps
Across my frame?
Is it death? Is it death?

The curtain falls.

ONLY THE BIRDS

By

ESTHER SAGALYN

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CAST

RALPH LEROY, *a movie actor.*

GRACE LEROY, *his wife, a movie actress.*

MICHAEL LEROY, *their son, aged eighteen, a student at Weylan.*

THEODORE LEROY, *their son, aged seventeen, a student at Ormond.*

MARTHA LEROY, *their daughter, aged sixteen, a student at Miss Hiram's boarding school.*

SCENE. A hotel bedroom, New York City.

TIME. The present.

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It is evening. Outside the hotel can be heard faintly the noise of the city of New York. The shades are drawn; the lights are on in the bedroom.

The entrance door is down left; a bed right center; a window up center; a desk and two chairs up left; a door leading to the bathroom left center; a door down left, now open, leading to a dressing room; a night-table with a telephone on it beside the bed up right.

When the curtain rises, Ted is lying on the bed, groaning quietly to himself. He is seventeen, tall, very nice-looking, dark, his hair very tousled.

He takes a flask out of the pocket of his coat, which is lying at the foot of the bed, and drinks for a second from it; then puts it under the pillow and lies down again. He turns his head in the direction of the dressing room door and calls.

TED. Marthie! (*More insistently.*) Marthie!

MARTHA (*off stage*). What do you want, Teddy?

TED. I feel lousy, Marthie.

MARTHA (*off stage*). Drink something.

TED. I have been, Marthie. (*Plaintively.*)

MARTHA. Well, take another drink.

TED. If you insist. (*He takes the flask from under the pillow, takes another drink, and puts it back again under the pillow.*) I'm gettin' so sick of waitin', Marthie. Why don't they come?

MARTHA. Mike ought to be here soon.

TED (*who has taken out the flask and is considering it*). What?

MARTHA (*yelling*). I said Mike ought to be here pretty soon.

TED. The whole damned family! Well, here's to 'em.

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(He drinks again. Martha comes out of the dressing room. She is a rather short girl, sixteen, slender, with long black hair done in a sleek small coil at the back of her neck, and outrageous curled bangs on her forehead. Her finger nails are a brilliant scarlet. She is wearing a long black, very sophisticated satin evening gown, with a long train which she has difficulty in managing. On her feet she is wearing sensible, heavy English brogues, making the evening gown look completely incongruous. She is carrying in her hand an opened movie magazine which she is examining very closely. She stops in front of the long mirror on the bathroom door, without looking at Ted, poses for a second, then looks at the picture in the magazine and postures again, looking at herself from every possible angle. Then she starts to brush back her bangs with an impatient gesture, for they won't stay back. She gives up with a despairing sigh and postures again, trying to make her face resemble the picture in the magazine by sucking in her cheeks, raising her eyebrows, thrusting back her head and her hands, and looking over her shoulder at her reflection in the mirror.)

TED *(who has been watching her and sipping from the flask)*. My God, Marthie.

MARTHA *(still looking at the mirror)*. How do I look, Lord Jeff?

TED. Where did you get the dress?

MARTHA. Didn't you see mother's last picture? She had one exactly like it! She was simply marvelous! *(Walks over to Ted and holds out the magazine to him.)* Here's her picture, and there's a long article on her this month. But it didn't even mention us!

TED. Aw, we'd cramp her style. I think I got cramps, Marthie!

MARTHA *(looking up and seeing the flask)*. A flask! You've been seeing too many movies!

TED. You get a dress like mother's; I get a flask like dad's.

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MARTHA (*bending over him and sniffing*). You've been drinking, Teddy Leroy!

TED. You told me . . .

MARTHA. I meant water! Feel sick?

TED. My stomach's kind of upside down and my tongue's too big . . .

MARTHA. What'll dad say?

TED. Say, I can tell him a few things or two. Look at that.

[*Reaches up and pulls a newspaper out of his pocket, which he hands to Martha.*]

MARTHA (*looking at it*). Where?

TED. In the tattle column.

MARTHA (*finding the column*). Ummm. Oh. (*Reading.*) "Who's the gorgeous blonde Ralph Leroy has been . . ."

TED (*interrupting as he gets up and heads for the door*). I need some air. My head's whirlin'. Tell 'em I was sorry I couldn't stay but I got troubles enough.

MARTHA (*dropping the paper on the bed and rushing over to Ted*). You can't go now. Mother and dad want to see us!

[*She grabs his arm.*]

TED. Leggo! I don't want to be seen. Say, they've left you and me and Mike alone all these years. Didn't they see us once this year when we all left for school? Now they gotta come busting up spring vacation with meet-in's. Like elks.

[*Tries to open the door.*]

MARTHA (*tugging at his arm*). Please come back. It'll be fun seeing them again. Why, all the kids at Miss Hiram's are jealous of me having parents in the movies.

TED. Well, they wouldn't be if they had 'em for parents!

[*He starts to open the door again.*]

MARTHA. Oh!

[*She rouses herself to action, grasps Ted, whose back is to her, firmly around the waist, trips him; and they*]

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both fall on the floor and simultaneously start to laugh.
TED (*on the floor*). Well, you haven't forgotten how to wrestle!

MARTHA (*getting up unsteadily because her train is in the way*). I didn't know what to do. I've never been alone with a drunken man before.

TED. I've never been drunk before, so I can't help you. (*More to himself.*) Maybe I shouldn't have had all that beer on the way down to New York!

MARTHA (*helping Ted to his feet*). Do you know what they wanted us to come here for?

TED (*stumbling over to the bed and lying down*). Must have been the beer!

MARTHA. Will you listen, please. (*Impressively.*) There's going to be a divorce!

TED (*looking at her, but unimpressed*). How do you know?

MARTHA. It's rumored in this magazine.

TED. Say, if they split up, we can get double allowances.

MARTHA. Do you suppose dad'll have an English accent?

TED. I thought it was Spanish.

MARTHA. That was the picture before the one where he's an Englishman.

TED (*imitating*). How too beastly funny! (*The phone rings and Ted leans over and answers it, mimicking still.*)

Are you there? I say, Lord Brooktrout! (*Falling out of his accent.*) Who'd ya say? Michael Leroy? Sure. Send him up. Send everybody who comes, up. (*Shuts down.*) Good old Mike. That makes the three of us. Get me a glass of water, will ya, Marthie?

MARTHA (*as she goes into the bathroom with a glass*). Someone told me, I just remember, that water makes you even drunker.

[*Sound of water running.*]

TED (*now that Martha is out of the room, he takes out the flask and takes another drink*). Nonsense. Water's a friend to man. Says so in the "knowledge" book.

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[He lies back and again puts the flask under the pillow as Martha walks out with a glass of water.]

MARTHA. You're such a dub.

[Hands him the water; he drinks.]

TED. To Mike, our li'l scholar!

MARTHA *(as she puts the glass down on the night-table)*.
Feel better?

TED. I'm dizzier than I was before; not really drunk, you understand, but just dizzy.

[He tosses on the bed.]

MARTHA. Oh, what'll mother say!

TED. She'll do a swell "mother" scene.

[There is a knock at the door. Martha runs to it and ushers in Mike, eighteen, shorter than Ted, but just as dark. He is dressed impeccably, and his face is very earnest and boyish. He carries a notebook under his arm and assumes every now and then a professorial manner through which his own personality constantly breaks.]

MARTHA. Gosh, I'm glad to see you, Mike.

[Mike kisses her cheek.]

MIKE. You look nice, sis, but what a fancy dress! *(He looks beyond her and sees Ted.)* Hi there!

TED *(his voice rather thick)*. 'Lo, mugg! My, what a poppycock. Just like dad.

MIKE *(staring at Ted)*. You look kind of green, kid.
What's the matter?

TED. You're too young to know.

MARTHA *(to Mike)*. How's Weylan?

MIKE *(taking off his coat)*. The nuts!

TED. "Nuts" is right.

MARTHA. Beginning again, eh?

TED. Say, that's a nice looking tie ya got on, Mike.

MIKE. Nix, brother, nix. This stays on.

TED. Say, I got a brown suit that tie would just . . .

MIKE. Oh, I'll lend it to you . . . Say, Teddy, you look like dad when he's sort of fuzzy. What is the matter?
You're the color of a dead fish.

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TED (*stiffly*). You wouldn't understand. You learn these things at Weylan.

MARTHA. Be quiet, Teddy. What'll we do, Mike? He's drunk, and mother and dad'll be here any minute.

MIKE (*sitting down at the desk, taking out a pen, and opening his notebook. Martha sits on the bed*). Drunk, eh?

[*He writes something in the book.*]

MARTHA. What's that?

MIKE (*impressively but casually*). Notes for a paper I'm doing. I'm collecting empirical facts.

[*He coughs as if the word costs him an effort, which it does.*]

MARTHA. On what?

MIKE. On the family in America.

TED. A lot any Leroy knows about it!

MIKE (*defensively*). I happen to know plenty. Now, just when did you start to drink, and why?

TED. I started when I was four to help my liver . . . Aw, leave me alone, will ya?

MARTHA. Mother and dad are going to get a divorce, I think, Mike.

MIKE (*preoccupied*). I suspected as much.

TED. Our boy scout! Always prepared!

MARTHA. What do you suppose they want a divorce for, Mike.

TED. It's life, kid. Why does anybody want anything?

MIKE (*solemnly, and turning around to look at them*). Kids, we've got to do something.

TED. It's life, I tell you.

MIKE. Remember when we were all kids and used to sit around at dinner and talk and laugh, you and Ted and me and mother and dad.

TED. No, I can't. How can you remember that far back?

MARTHA. I saw a picture like that once.

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MIKE. I got a retentive mind, I guess. Listen, we gotta get it back.

TED. Ye old homestead?

MIKE. Sure. Wouldn't you like a home?

TED. Well, I am kind of sick of hotel rooms.

MARTHA. What would it really be like, Mike?

TED. I visited a kid Christmas vacation. Gosh, it was fun. His mother baked bread.

MIKE. We've got to be a face-to-face group again.

TED. Last year it was philosophy, and we weren't really sitting on chairs, but just our ideas of chairs. What is it now?

MIKE. Sociology. I'm taking a swell course. Learn all about families. I got to thinking about ours, and then I got that telegram to come here. That clinched it.

MARTHA. Clinched what?

MIKE (*excitedly*). We're a good example of what's happening to the family today. Now in colonial times . . .

TED. Get down to us.

MIKE. Well, we're not a family unit any more.

TED. Aw, talk sense. We have parents, haven't we? We're legitimate, aren't we? What more do you want?

MIKE (*scathingly*). Wise guy! Do you think we're playing fair with mother and dad?

TED (*in his imitation English accent*). You mean cricket, don't you, old chap?

MIKE. As soon as they started making money in Hollywood, what happened?

MARTHA. Why, we were in school, most of the time.

MIKE. And at camp the rest of the time.

TED. So what?

MIKE. Why, we never saw them more than twice a year.

TED. Don't you go to the movies?

MARTHA. I don't know what you're talking about, Mike, but I can manage my own life.

MIKE. I don't know what this younger generation is com-

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ing to. I think the least we can do for our parents is to give them a home.

MARTHA. How do you know mother wants one?

MIKE. She's gotta. She's a woman.

TED. Aren't women emancipated?

MARTHA. How do you expect mother to spend her time in a home?

MIKE. Why, uh, all wives have duties and, and — things.

TED. Listen, mugg, mother pays other people to do her duties. She has a career.

MIKE. Well, it's wrong. She needs a home. Do you realize that the most important function the family institution performs is its determination of the whole pattern of social relations? (*They are all silent, stunned by this revelation. Mike is impressed himself.*) Honest! Why, it's gotten so bad that some professor says that except for the Gallinaceous family, real genuine marriage can only be found among the birds.

MARTHA. Birds!

MIKE (*comfortingly*). Mammals aren't in as bad a way as the subkingdom of the Invertebrates, where family relations are very, very fugitive.

TED. Aw, talk English.

[*He sits up disgustedly, reaches under the pillow for the flask which Martha sees.*]

MARTHA (*shrieking*). Oh, Teddy, darling, stop it, please.

MIKE. You see, no parental control! (*He snatches the flask away before Ted can unscrew the top. Ted sinks back, after shrugging his shoulders wearily, and covers his face with his hands.*) Dad should be here to administer discipline.

MARTHA. You're just talking generally about families, Mike. We're not a bit like that.

MIKE (*admitting it*). I know. I can't quite figure out just where we belong. We haven't split up because of the factory system, or because we have so many homes

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we never manage to meet in the same house at the same time.

TED. Is that supposed to be funny?

MIKE. Am I laughing? Hell, it's tragic.

TED. What do you need a home to meet in, for? That's what hotels are for.

MARTHA. Mike's talking about the kind of home where the mother sits all day and waits for her husband to come back from his business.

MIKE (*inspired*). That's it. Mother should sit, more. She should become a home-maker.

MARTHA. Why, she doesn't even play bridge.

MIKE. Well, she could learn, couldn't she? Say, why don't they come?

MARTHA. Now, don't try to convince her about home-making. She lives differently. I think it's a swell life.

[*She goes to the mirror and starts her posturing again.*]

MIKE (*slowly and seriously*). But it scares me; all over the world families breaking up, other institutions taking over their functions.

TED. It sure is a terrible thing, this progress.

MIKE. Mowrer says it's the female revolt that has weakened the husband's sense of accountability for his wife's conduct. Gosh, there's no telling what mother's been up to. It's all wrong somewhere.

MARTHA. Don't you think it's kind of fun having exciting parents like ours that get in the newspapers and magazines and things?

MIKE. But that's being selfish. Think of their future. They're getting old.

MARTHA. Do you know that movie magazine said mother had a twenty-ninth birthday this month.

MIKE. You see! She's getting scared; lying about her age.

MARTHA (*who has picked up the tattle column and is reading to herself*). Scared of what?

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MIKE. Of living, of growing old. What's going to happen to mother and dad after we grow up?

TED. I give up.

MIKE (*disregarding Ted's levity*). We've broken from them already. But think of them all alone in the world, old, friendless. They need us, don't you see?

TED. I never thought of that.

MARTHA. No, I don't see. Dad has a dizzy blonde.

TED. How do you know she's dizzy?

MARTHA. Well, she's blonde. It says here (*Reading from the newspaper.*) "Who is the gorgeous blonde Ralph Leroy has been seen night-clubbing it with?"

MIKE (*distastefully*). "It with!" Such atrocious English. Now he's an escapist, too. Why, it's tragic. Listen, kids, it's not for us that we've got to reconcile them; it's for our parents' sake.

TED (*getting maudlin*). Poor mother and dad, getting old; and all of us away, not needing them, not giving a damn. Why, I didn't even want to come.

MARTHA. Why, Teddy, you're going to make me cry.

TEDDY (*sniffing*). The whole world's washed up. Everybody's all alone. It's awful, awful.

[*He starts to blubber and then to cry.*]

MIKE (*amazed*). What the devil . . .

MARTHA. It must be because he's drunk and not used to it. (*A knock at the door interrupts her. Her voice becomes reverent and hushed.*) Answer it, Mike. It's one of THEM!

[*Mike opens the door, and Grace Leroy walks in. She is rather tall, very dark, with long black hair coiled at the back of her head. She has on a long black evening wrap, and underneath it, a white satin evening gown, very simple and expensive. Her eyes are large and heavy, probably with make-up.*]

MOTHER (*in a low, dramatically husky voice*). My children. (*She puts her hand out to Mike, who stands gaping.*) Michael, dear.

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MIKE. Hello, mother.

[He takes her hand suddenly and kisses it, bowing slightly in very continental fashion.]

MOTHER *(laughing indulgently)*. You may kiss your mother, dear.

MIKE. You look sort of like a queen.

MOTHER *(pleased)*. Silly boy!

[She kisses him on the cheek.]

MARTHA *(who has been staring at her mother, wide-eyed, rushes across the room impetuously, and flings herself into her mother's arms)*. Oh, mother, darling, you're so much more beautiful than your pictures.

MOTHER. My severest critic. *(She kisses her, then holds her off and looks at her.)* Martha, what have you got on?

MARTHA *(modeling the dress)*. Do you love it?

MOTHER. It's impossible! *(Then, seeing Martha crest-fallen.)* I'll go shopping with you tomorrow, and we'll find something more appropriate, yes? *(She smiles charmingly, and Martha finally smiles, too. As Mike helps his mother off with her wrap, she notices Ted.)* Why, Theodore!

TED *(sort of sniffly)*. 'Lo, ma! How are ya, ma?

MOTHER *(rushing over to him)*. What is the matter? Is my boy sick?

MIKE *(inspired)*. He . . . he's lonesome. He needs maternal care.

MOTHER *(sitting down on the bed and gathering Ted into her arms)*. My poor child. There, now. Don't weep, my son. *(Ted starts to sniffle again.)* You've got your mother back again. There. There. *[She rocks back and forth with Ted.]*

TED *(muffled, because his face is against his mother's neck)*. I feel awful, ma.

MOTHER. Ah, cry it out, my darling. Lonesome for his mother. I understand. *(In a changed voice.)* Don't spot my dress. *(Takes out a handkerchief to wipe his*

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face, and Ted takes it from her in his unconscious, usual way and blows his nose. His mother starts to rock back and forth singing as in a lullaby.) Aah-aah-baby; aah-aah-baby.

MIKE. Gosh, mother, I've never seen you like this before.

MOTHER. Ah, my children, I am a mother first; a woman afterwards.

MARTHA (*eagerly*). Have you, have you missed us, mother?

[*A knock at the door saves the mother from answering. Mike opens it, and admits his father, Ralph Leroy. He is very tall, grey at the temples, faultlessly dressed in full evening dress.*

FATHER (*in a cultured and very English voice*). Do I intrude?

MIKE (*putting out his hand*). How do you do, sir!

FATHER (*taking his hand, and putting his arm around his shoulder and staring at him incredulously*). Why, how do you do, son! Growing up, by gad. You do look like me, rather. (*Martha, who has walked over to him rather shyly, he kisses, and pushes down the bangs which she has just tried to push back.*) So this is Martha.

MARTHA. I'm glad to see you, dad.

FATHER. You are getting very pretty, my dear.

[*Pleased, Martha reaches up impulsively and kisses him.*

FATHER (*laughing, and rumpling her hair*). Very pretty.

[*Then he sees his wife, and he bows, smiling a little.*

MOTHER. Late as usual, Ralph.

FATHER. No later than usual. And how long have you been here?

MOTHER. Hours, simply hours, waiting and waiting.

[*Martha and Mike exchange glances.*

FATHER (*indicating Ted in his wife's arms*). Isn't this rather out of your line? Going into character rôles?

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MOTHER. Don't be catty. The child's been neglected by his father and is lonesome for his mother.

FATHER. I must confess, you look rather charming. Not at all like you, don't you know; but charming.

MOTHER (*aware of his accent*). Thanks, old thing. You don't look exactly beastly, yourself, don't you know. Oh, come off it, Ralph. I've known you longer than the new accent.

FATHER. Doesn't it sound authentic?

MOTHER. Now, you're a dear. I really love you when your defenses are down.

FATHER (*bending over her hand and kissing it lightly*). That's a comfort. We shall be friends.

MOTHER. But of course.

[*Mike and Martha have become an audience, momentarily, and place themselves quietly up left so their parents do not see them. Ted snuffles.*]

FATHER. What seems to be the matter with Michael?

MIKE. I'm Mike, sir; that's Ted. Remember?

FATHER (*looking up, rather surprised that the children are real*). Oh, of course. I just . . . (*In a parental and forbidding tone.*) What have you been up to, Theodore?

MOTHER. Up to? He's lonely. He needs a proper father's care. I think I shall provide him with one.

FATHER. Who is he? That second Valentino?

MOTHER. Don't glower, dear. Mario is really a charming fellow.

FATHER. I am the boy's father, and I won't have you marrying this Mario, or anyone else I don't approve of. My children must have the best.

MOTHER. I wouldn't trust your taste, darling.

FATHER. Are you casting aspersions . . .

MOTHER. I'm sure Patricia is a charming girl, though her hair is atrocious. A little less peroxide . . .

FATHER. Grace, I swear I'll . . .

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MOTHER. I'm free-lancing now, darling; I'm not accountable to you.

MIKE (*whispering loudly and excitedly to Martha*). You see!

MARTHA. Ssh!

FATHER (*sitting down on the other side of Ted on the bed*).

Well, I've still got authority over my children. Now, he's too old to be coddled. Sit up, young man.

MOTHER. Don't touch him, Ralph. I have a woman's instincts about this sort of thing. Let me handle it.

FATHER (*bending over Ted*). Now listen, I'm his father, and . . . (*Straightening up.*) Wheee! Get a whiff of that!

MOTHER. Of what?

FATHER. He's been drinking.

MOTHER. Oh, no!

FATHER. He's as drunk as a lord.

MOTHER (*shaking Ted to rouse him*). Theodore. Theodore, darling. (*Ted sits up.*) Tell mother! You haven't been . . .

[*Ted suddenly claps his hand over his mouth, gets up and heads for the bathroom. Mike gets up and rushes after him, slamming the bathroom door shut.*]

FATHER (*undisturbed*). I know how he feels.

MOTHER (*with venom*). I don't doubt it.

FATHER (*disregarding her*). If he takes a cold shower, he'll feel chipper within an hour.

MOTHER (*distractedly*). What shall I do? Do you think I should hold his head?

FATHER (*laughing lightly*). I couldn't picture it. He'll get over it. Teach him a lesson not to mix his drinks.

MOTHER (*starting to pace the room*). How can you sit there calmly when your son is in there deathly ill? Do something!

FATHER (*getting up and going to the bathroom door, opening it and calling in*). Put him under the shower, Theo . . . Michael. He'll be all right.

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[He shuts the door and paces the floor of the room.]

MOTHER. Stop following me around. I'm nervous.

FATHER (*taking out a cigarette and lighting it*). Your disposition hasn't changed, my dear.

MARTHA (*who has been getting more and more disturbed, comes forward*). Oh, don't, don't fight, please.

FATHER (*caught unawares*). Huh?

MOTHER. We're not quarreling, my dear. We're just talking.

MARTHA (*her voice unsteady*). You're both so lovely.

It's, it's not right. (*She is nervous and distraught.*)

I . . . I'm sorry. May I please have a cigarette, dad?

MOTHER Cigarette!

FATHER. At your age!

MARTHA (*defensively*). I'm sixteen.

FATHER. That's no excuse. Your mother didn't smoke at sixteen. My mother didn't smoke at sixteen.

MARTHA. Times have changed since mother's day. That was ages back. (*Her mother visibly recoils.*) Everyone smokes now.

FATHER (*very pompously*). In my family, times have not changed. You are not to smoke.

MARTHA (*plaintively, and pitting her mother against the father*). Mother, can't I smoke?

MOTHER (*flattered that Martha has turned to her, but still smarting under the blow to her supposed youthful appearance*). In another year or two. You don't want to grow up too quickly, dear.

[There is a terrific noise of people falling and moving things about inside the bathroom.]

FATHER (*irritably*). What is it?

[Sounds of Mike and Ted yelling: "Stop it, you nit-wit. Let go. Ouch. Damn."]

MOTHER (*raising her voice*). Come out here, Michael. What's happened?

[Mike emerges, his hair rumpled, his coat jacket open,

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one sleeve pushed up. He pulls it down as he comes out.

MICHAEL (*smiling*). Aw, nothing much. Ted got playful and tried to drag me under the shower with him. He's all right; just endowed with a strong instinct to . . . (*He sees Martha and interrupts himself.*)

What are you so mad about, Marthie?

MARTHA. I'm, I'm being frustrated!

MIKE (*turning to his mother, his shoulders hunched in bewilderment*). What did she say?

MOTHER. Frustrated! Where do you pick up such language? Look at her: bright polish on her nails; that dress! Why, darling child, you're still my baby. Who in the world picks out your clothes?

FATHER (*to his wife. He is playing the irate father and husband with interest and much expression*). Who, indeed! Are you the child's mother? I tell you, Grace, I won't have my children neglected, running loose. They need discipline.

MIKE (*who listens to this with satisfaction*). Exactly, sir. Now my point is that parental discipline is beneficial both for the parent who administers it and for the child who receives it. Further more, . . .

FATHER (*interrupting*). My own son criticizing me. I won't have it, do you hear! Who called this meeting, anyway?

MOTHER. We both made the agreement: the disposition of the children. (*Impatiently.*) Don't you remember, Ralph?

MARTHA. Well, whatever happens, Mike and Ted and I stick together. You can't separate us.

[*This last with some show of passion.*]

MIKE (*calmly and judiciously*). She's right, in a way. We've an affectional tie, you see.

[*As if this explained everything.*]

MOTHER (*a little bewildered, to Martha*). But wouldn't you like to spend some time alone with me, dear?

MARTHA (*rather coldly*). Not especially. Last time I

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visited you I never saw you anyway, just that darned nurse-maid.

MOTHER. I was busy with a picture. You were so young, then.

MARTHA. Oh, mother, you treat us as if we were such babies. You don't seem to want us to grow up. We can take care of ourselves.

MOTHER. But I want to take care of you too, dear.

[*She is hurt and surprised at the child's coldness.*]

MIKE. Ah, no, mother. It's not enough to have one parent. That doesn't make a family unit. But it's all right, mother. We understand.

FATHER (*irritably*). What is all this talk about? Understand what?

MIKE. Families all over the world are doing the same thing, all except the birds. It's just progress, I guess.

FATHER. Good God, has he a fever? Are you ill, son?

MOTHER. Michael darling, have you been drinking, too? Tell mother.

MIKE. Of course not. I just happen to realize a few simple facts. You two don't seem to understand it's the family that determines the forms of accommodation acceptable in larger groups. We've had no family, and now you disapprove of the responses we are making to . . .

MOTHER (*angrily*). I won't have you lecturing me, Michael. Stop it, this minute.

MIKE. All I'm trying to do is set you right on a . . .

MOTHER. I've had enough of this. Martha, go change your clothes. You'll send that dress back in the morning.

MARTHA (*recklessly*). You can't order me about, can she Mike? (*To her mother.*) I'm old enough to pick out my own clothes. Oh, why do you have to interfere?

FATHER (*thundering*). Martha, you will not use that tone with your mother. Stop arguing and do as you are told.

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MARTHA (*appealing for help*). Mike.

MIKE (*rising to the occasion*). Can't you see, sir, Martha has been denied the organization of behavior which a child absorbs spontaneously . . .

MOTHER. Michael, show respect that is due your father. Stop this talk. For God's sake, stop it.

MIKE. I was only trying to explain . . .

FATHER. Your mother needs no such explanations, nor do I.

MARTHA (*sputtering*). Why, Mike was . . .

MOTHER. We've had enough in your direction, Martha.

MARTHA. What are you backing each other up for? (*Wildly, to her father.*) Why, you don't even love her!

FATHER. MARTHA!

MIKE (*less calmly than before*). Aw, how can you reprimand!

FATHER (*sputtering*). Why the id . . .

MARTHA. We know all about you. (*Shaking her finger under her father's nose.*) Don't you go galavanting around with dizzy blondes?

MOTHER. Martha!

MIKE. She's right, in a way. (*Turning on his mother.*) And you, didn't you just have a twenty-ninth birthday? Why, tell me why, when we all know you're thirty-seven! Are you ashamed of us? Is that the reason?

MARTHA (*to her father*). We know all about it. Her name's Patricia Lowry, isn't it?

MIKE (*to his mother*). And we understand you've been running around with an Italian count. A Fascist, I'll bet. Is it true?

[*The mother is beside herself with anger, and yet is amused in her recognition of the inherently dramatic value of the situation. Both her hands are at the back of her head, but one can't make sure whether they are there in a gesture of tearing her hair, covering her ears, or feline speculation. The father is determined to play the rôle of*

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father to the bitter end, to get control over these two screaming, scolding children.

FATHER. This is insufferable. I won't have it; do you hear! Stop it. Stop it, both of you.

TED (*from the bathroom, adding to the clamor by yelling loudly*). Mike! Mike! Come here. I got soap in my eye.

MIKE (*looking around frantically*). Oh, can't you see you can't suddenly start to treat us as if we were your children, as if we were really a family?

[*Having delivered himself of this final judgment, he rushes out, slamming the bathroom door after him, and leaving Martha to finish the battle alone.*]

MARTHA. You don't act a bit like your pictures. There's no glamor to you at all.

[*She is weeping now, and bursts out in loud, heart-rending weeping.*]

MOTHER (*compassionately, and rather touched, puts her arms around Martha, kisses the top of her head*). Cheer up, my baby. Go into your room and change your clothes like a good girl; and we shall try to be more glamorous.

[*Martha, still crying, stumbles out of the room by way of the dressing room door, and slams the door after her.*]

FATHER. My God! (*Takes out a handkerchief from his left coat pocket, wipes his forehead, and carefully replaces it.*) Whee! These our kids? (*Reflectively.*) She'll make a damned good actress!

MOTHER (*in a high tragedy voice*). How did we come to this? What right did I have to bear them?

FATHER (*genuinely*). The poor kids! They make me feel sort of sad.

MOTHER. What kind of a mother have I been to my babies! Ralph, did I want them so terribly?

[*This last, said in all sincerity.*]

FATHER. I guess we both did, then. Remember? They

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were all born during our streaks of bad luck; the only times you and I seemed to get together amiably. God, that was a long time ago.

MOTHER (*sighing*). A long time ago. But I've grown since then. How could I spend all my time bringing up children? I had to sacrifice something.

FATHER. Are you by any chance trying to justify yourself?

[*Unsympathetically.*]

MOTHER. I don't know. I don't know. (*Turning on him.*) You, what justification have you? Your responsibilities never weighed you down.

FATHER (*stiffly*). And you?

MOTHER. Oh, let's not keep throwing the ball back and forth. I'm just a different woman, now. (*She is pacing the room. She is talking more to herself than to her erstwhile husband.*) I'm young yet. I can't submerge myself forever, can I?

FATHER. You might try it sometime and see.

[*He takes out a cigarette and lights it.*]

MOTHER. Still quick at the draw, aren't you? Oh, give me a cigarette too, Ralph.

[*She moves toward him, and he takes one out and holds a light for her. For a moment they are both silent.*]

FATHER (*suddenly. Looking at her intently*). Grace.

MOTHER (*surprised at the softness of his tone*). Yes, Ralph?

FATHER (*sitting down on the bed, his elbows on his knees, his head in his arms*). Oh, I'm tired.

MOTHER (*sitting down beside him*). So am I. They're such a problem, aren't they? I hadn't realized how big they all were. Why, Michael must be almost nineteen. (*She laughs wryly.*) What would my public say!

FATHER (*lifting his head and turning toward her*). Do you care?

MOTHER. I can't help it; I do. It took me long enough to get where I am.

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FATHER (*taking one of her hands in his, and playing absently with her fingers and addressing his remarks to them*). Grace, have you ever thought very much about us?

MOTHER. I have enough headaches without that. (*Then contritely.*) How could I, Ralph? I've been so busy I never really had the time.

FATHER (*he is growing more and more agreeable and tender, and now a little whimsical*). Well (*Looking at his watch.*) here's two minutes. Ready? Go.

MOTHER (*falling in with his mood*). May I think out loud?

FATHER. Please do.

MOTHER. I only need half the time.

FATHER. Well, what do you say?

MOTHER. To hell with my public.

[*The mother alternates between being her various selves, as does the father. One second they are natural, average people, and the next moment they are conscious, pre-meditated people, observing themselves even while they are talking or walking. Here, for example, the mother is the self we should call her real self; but then, one never knows!*

FATHER. My darling!

[*He catches both her hands and bends his head to kiss them.*

MOTHER (*stroking his head*). You're getting a little bald on top, dear. You comb it artfully.

FATHER (*not paying any attention to what she is saying*). God, but it will be good again. I'm suddenly so sick of the merry-go-round I've been riding.

MOTHER. Why, that was my cue in a play we did years ago. I've forgotten my line.

FATHER. Ad lib.

MOTHER. "I want a home, a wife . . ." no, that was your line. Oh, yes: "I, too, need something warm, something enduring to sustain me."

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FATHER. "And I've been wandering; no focal point; no one to share things with."

MOTHER. "My poor dear."

FATHER. "I'm getting on."

MOTHER. "I, too."

FATHER. "Ah, you, you are lovely still. I . . . I love you very much, even now."

MOTHER. "Why didn't you tell me?"

[She turns to him, according to the old stage directions.]

FATHER. "Because, because, because . . ."

[He has forgotten his line.]

MOTHER (prompting him unconsciously, as she probably had to do years back). "Because you didn't dare."

FATHER. "I didn't dare."

MOTHER. "Ah, you were always so shy, so sweet."

FATHER. "Darling, let's do it. Let's start again, the two of us, and the little ones."

MOTHER. "Ah, yes, the little ones."

FATHER. "My dearest."

[He catches her in his arms theatrically and they kiss dramatically, also according to the stage directions of the old play. He tries to upstage her unconsciously, and just as unconsciously, she prevents him from so doing. On the "My dearest" line, the bathroom door opens abruptly and Mike's face appears and stares at his parents, who are having too good a time to notice. His face disappears, and reappears accompanied by Ted's head. They shake hands as if this were all due to them, which it is, and Ted makes a gesture to leave the bathroom; but Mike yanks him back and the bathroom door shuts discreetly.]

MOTHER (following a train of silent thought). I think I'll have pictures taken in a living room in front of a fire, with me reading to the children.

FATHER (back to his old English self). By Jove, the Leroy's reunited! It'll look good on the notices.

MOTHER (calling). Michael! Theodore!

[The bathroom door opens very promptly, and Mike and

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Ted come out. Ted has wrapped himself up in a huge bath towel, from which his long legs seem to dangle, and over which his shiny smiling face emerges.

TED (*genially*). Howdy, folks. Didja miss me?

MOTHER. Terribly. Feel better?

TED. Like a new man.

MIKE (*embarrassed, and staring at his parents, who are standing affectionately together*). I didn't mean to, to lecture, sir. I'm sorry, mother.

MOTHER (*graciously*). We understand, dear. And as for you, Theodore, no more drinking!

FATHER. Next time it happens, son, I'll thrash you.

TED. Say, I could knock you out in the first round. Look at those muscles, will you! Look at 'em.

[*He raises his right, bare arm and exhibits his muscle.*]

FATHER (*excitedly*). Say, Grace, I'll have pictures taken with me in boxing shorts, sparring with the boys, the man-to-man sort of thing. You know!

TED. Huh? Watcha talkin' about? (*Mike kicks Ted discreetly to make him shut up.*) Say, ouch!

FATHER. What is it, Theodore?

MOTHER (*calling*). Martha, aren't you dressed yet?

TED (*to his father*). Aw, Mike started . . .

MARTHA (*off stage*). I'm coming.

MIKE (*shushing Ted*). Nix, mugg.

MARTHA (*emerging in a simple brown suit and bright sweater. She is still just a little sniffly and tearful, and she comes out combing her bangs out*). How shall (*Sniff.*) I wear them, mother? (*Sniff.*) Down, or back?

MOTHER. Am I to answer as a parent, or woman to woman?

MARTHA (*looking up for the first time, and seeing her parents standing affectionately, or rather intimately, together*). Oh! I didn't . . . Why, which way would you rather?

MOTHER (*dramatically*). As your mother.

TED. Say, what's all this about? (*He edges pointedly*

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away from Mike, as if he were afraid Mike would kick him again.) Isn't there going to be any divorce?

[All the kids are suddenly breathless, and wait expectantly, for this is the question in all their minds.]

FATHER (*moving away from his wife. Clearing his throat*). Well, did you hear any specific mention of one?

MIKE. Well, not exactly, sir, that is . . . well, in a way . . .

TED. Not specifically.

FATHER. No, quite on the contrary. Your mother and I may decide to take a house for all of us.

[He addresses the gathering in a slightly pompous way.]

MOTHER. A charming little house.

MIKE (*puzzled at the sociological implication, and wanting to define the more subtle and more important point*).

A house? You mean a home?

MOTHER (*very impatiently. She does not think sociologically nor on subtler points*). Of course, a house. You understand what a house is.

MIKE (*slowly. He decides perhaps it's a quibble and not worth a fuss*). Oh, sure; of course. A house. Well, that rather changes the angle of my paper.

FATHER. Of what?

MIKE (*throwing fine distinctions overboard completely*). Aw, forget it. I'm talking through my hat. It's all so sudden and kind of unexpected. Say, I think it would be swell.

MARTHA (*who has been made speechless at first by the announcement, and then has listened anxiously to Mike's parrying, finally decides her excitement can be legitimate if Mike says it's all right*). Do you mean we'll all live together? Oh, mother.

[She flings herself into her mother's arms. The mother pats the girl's head. She is a little bewildered by her violence.]

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FATHER. That is our intention, more or less.

MARTHA. Gosh, it'll be better than that movie I saw once.

MOTHER (*to Ted*). Well, that leaves you. Are you with us, Theodore?

TED (*only half-serious, but he is cautious*). Well, I don't know. I don't get along well with people.

MIKE. Our little eremite.

MARTHA. Our what?

MIKE (*turning to his father*). Honestly, sir, these kids are absolutely uneducated.

TED (*more to himself*). Say, I'll be able to bring kids to my house now. Do you mean it?

[*He turns to his father.*]

FATHER (*embarrassed by all the emotion the children are displaying*). Why, of course . . .

[*He is a little ashamed of himself, too.*]

TED. I feel as if we're all dreamin' or somethin'.

MARTHA (*who has settled herself on the bed, dreaming*).

Oh, it'll be so wonderful. I'll have a room of my own in a home. (*She jumps up with excitement and claps her hands softly, with happiness, as a little girl might.*)

We'll all be together every evening. (*Her parents shift their positions uncomfortably, uneasy at the swift turn things have taken. They steal glances at each other.*)

And we'll talk and play games, and go places together. What'll we do tonight?

MOTHER (*uncomfortably*). Well, I've already made . . .

TED. Say, let's have some food and things sent up, and we'll have our first meal together, and kind of celebrate. I could eat, all right!

MIKE. No, let's all of us go to the theatre together, tonight. A fellow at school told me not to miss . . .

FATHER (*uneasily*). Well, I've got an appointment
I . . .

MARTHA. Oh, you can cancel it, dad! This is important. (*She hugs him suddenly and says earnestly.*) I just love to call you "dad." (*She looks at his face closely*)

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for a moment. Then, very seriously and sweetly.) I could help you, dad, when you're learning your lines. I could read them to you when your eyes get tired.

FATHER (*kisses her abstractedly, and hems and haws*).

That's very sweet of you, my dear, but my eyes are still all right; and really, I have someone who . . .

[*He looks to his wife to help him out. He is really quite unhappy.*]

MOTHER (*trying to smooth things over, and ease the way for herself*). Now, I'm sure you all have things you would like to do by yourselves tonight, without us. You've probably made plans we shouldn't want to upset.

MIKE. Oh, mother, we wouldn't think of leaving you and dad now, would we?

[*He turns to the other two for confirmation.*]

TED. 'Course not. (*He stands beside his mother, and notices her short height.*) Say look, ma. (*His mother winces at the "ma."*) I'm much taller than you.

MOTHER (*laughing nervously*). You're a big boy now. But children, I really have to . . .

[*She turns to all of them.*]

MIKE (*interrupting and walking over to the 'phone*). I'll call up and reserve seats for a show. It's at the Imperial.

FATHER. Now, children, really, I wasn't banking on . . .

MARTHA. Oh, let's go to a place where people will see us. Maybe they'll recog . . .

[*Michael has started to dial the number. His father interrupts him and Martha sharply.*]

FATHER (*in a commanding tone*). Stop 'phoning, Michael. (*Mike stops, surprised, and puts the ear 'phone back slowly and turns around.*) I . . . I . . . (*Finally blurring it out.*) shall be tied up tonight. I can't break a previous engagement.

[*He walks center and quickly picks up his hat and coat.*]

MOTHER (*just as quickly picking up her evening wrap*).

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I have an appointment, too, which I simply can't break. I'm awfully sorry, dears. If I had realized . . .

MARTHA (*terribly crest-fallen*). Oh, couldn't we all go with you? You could have your appointments, and we'd wait for you, and then afterwards we could all go some place . . .

MOTHER (*quickly*). Oh, no! No! That wouldn't do. I . . . I think you should all go to bed early. Yes, that's what you should do.

TED. Aw, ma . . .

MIKE (*slowly*). Do you really have to leave us now?

MOTHER (*getting into her wrap*). I'm late already, darling. We'll see you all in the morning.

FATHER. Oh, yes. I'll arrange about the pictures. But now I've an appointment downstairs in the lobby.

[*He moves toward the exit door, steadily.*]

MOTHER (*turning toward him, surprised, and in a veiled tone*). Why, so have I; downstairs.

[*She laughs a little theatrically.*]

FATHER (*laughing sarcastically*). Funny, that! Go to bed soon, children.

[*He opens the exit door.*]

MOTHER (*standing at the door with her husband*). Don't they look sweet, Ralph! (*The children are lined up, unhappily looking at them.*) I can hardly believe they are mine. Goodnight, my dear, dear, children.

FATHER. Cheerio!

KIDS (*in a straggly chorus*). Goodnight. 'Bye. So long.

[*The door closes after the parents, and there is a moment of silence, with all the kids gazing at the door. Martha suddenly moves impatiently over to the table center, where the radio is, as if she were shaking unpleasant thoughts from her mind. She turns the radio on and gets some dance music. The music is "On the Isle of Bali-Bali" or something equally relaxing.*]

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MARTHA. Do you suppose we'll really have our pictures in the paper, as the Leroy children?

MIKE (*stoutly*). Sure. I suspected it right along.

[*He kicks at the post of the bed upstage, and slumps, his hands in his pockets.*]

TED (*flopping onto the bed wearily*). Aw, g'wan. (*He gets up from the bed, restless, and heads for the bathroom.*) I'm going to get dressed.

MIKE (*at the desk, fiddling with his notebook, trying to convince himself*). Don't mind him, Marthie. I mean what I say. It's a social institution, the family; and a social necessity.

MARTHA. Like insane asylums, I suppose.

[*The music has stopped, and the announcer comes on.*]

RADIO ANNOUNCER. We are broadcasting from the Caprice Room of the Hotel Charlemagne. Next we're offering you a very short novelty number by Don Donald and the boys. Swing it, Don.

[*The music starts; probably some xylophone affair.*]

MARTHA. Mike, they're broadcasting from our hotel. Maybe we could go down and see them. Do you want to?

MIKE (*listlessly*). Do you want to?

MARTHA (*sighing, and walking away from the radio, and pacing*). Not very much. Oh, Mike, do you suppose they love us terribly to give up things so we can have a home?

MIKE. Sure, kid.

MARTHA. But why did they have to leave so soon?

MIKE. Oh, they're probably making arrangements about the house, you know . . . surprise us.

TED (*coming out of the bathroom, buttoning up his shirt and then tying his tie*). Who's going to surprise us?

MARTHA. Do you really think so? Mother and dad, Ted. They're going to get the house, and then show it to us, maybe. I never thought of that.

MIKE. Well, I'm only guessing, in a way, you know.

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MARTHA. Oh, I feel so much better now, Mike. Of course that's it. They must love us terribly.

TED. Aw, we'll make it up to 'em. Say, what's that awful music?

MARTHA. It's broadcasted from this hotel.

TED. I don't care where it's broadcasted from. It depresses me. It makes me hungrier than I am!

MIKE. If she wants to listen to it, let her.

MARTHA. I'll turn it off, Ted.

[As she walks over to it.]

RADIO ANNOUNCER *(at first through the music. Then the music gets softer and stops)*. Wait a minute, everybody. Here is a surprise. Grace Leroy, the famous star of screen and stage, is just entering the Caprice Room. She is looking more glamorous than ever.

MARTHA *(excitedly)*. It's mother.

RADIO ANNOUNCER. And who's the tall dark man with her? I can't see from here.

TED *(getting excited)*. That must be dad. Say, mister, that's my father.

[He yells this into the radio. All the kids start to laugh at this, and Martha jumps up and down.]

RADIO ANNOUNCER. With her is Count Mario Donetti, the well-known polo player and collector of rare paintings.

[The whole last part of this, after Donetti, is inaudible because Martha is heard on top of it.]

MARTHA. Oh, he must have made a mistake.

ANNOUNCER. I've sent someone over to see if Miss Leroy would say "Hello" to all of you. She and the Count have just sat down at a table . . . whoa, folks . . . right next to that gorgeous blonde, Patricia Lowry, who is here with Ralph Leroy. That's what I call coincidence!

TED. Aw, shut up, you. Shut it off, Marthie.

MARTHA. I don't believe him.

ANNOUNCER. If we can't get one Leroy over here, maybe

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we can get the other. Rumor has it they're on the split and split. Just a minute, folks . . .

TED. I told you it was all a phony. It was too good to be true. Oh, turn that damned thing off.

ANNOUNCER. Ladies and Gentleman, I have the honor to present Grace Leroy. Miss Leroy.

[*Ted stops short and hesitates about shutting the radio off.*]

MOTHER. Hello, everyone!

[*She is honey-sweet.*]

ANNOUNCER. Would you mind answering a few questions all your millions of fans will be interested in?

MOTHER (*charmingly*). I am always at the service of my public.

ANNOUNCER. Now, what is the low-down on you and Ralph Leroy? Do you plan to marry Count Donetti?

MOTHER (*laughing*). Oh, please. Ralph and I remain the best of friends. I must go, really. Count Donetti is getting impatient.

ANNOUNCER. Hello, America, that was Grace Leroy talking to you from the Caprice Room of the Hotel Charl —

TED (*turning the radio off*). Damned things, radios. Mixing into everybody's business. You can't ever get away from anything anymore!

MARTHA. Oh, Mike. (*Mike puts his arm around her, and she hides her face on his shoulder.*) Why didn't she tell him . . .

TED (*his hands in his pockets, walking the room*). Well, it was a swell dream, wasn't it? Aw, heck!

[*He flops on the bed.*]

MIKE. I guess I'll write on the tribal family. (*To Martha.*) Oh, honey, it'll be all right. We'll see, tomorrow.

MARTHA. Oh, don't, Mike. Tomorrow they'll think they mean it, and the next night they'll forget. We're not actors; so we fell for it.

TED (*getting up*). Oh, what's the use! Nobody ever

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gets anythin' he wants. Let's go to the movies. (*He starts getting into his top-coat.*) Come on, Marthie. Aw, come on, Mike. Let's not mope. It's gettin' me down.

[*Ted is pretty near tears.*]

MIKE. Yeah! (*He pats Martha's head awkwardly.*)

Come on, Marthie. We can still have fun together.

MARTHA (*gets into her coat. Her face is stony and blank*). I haven't seen that picture of mother's playing at the Strand.

MIKE. I'll see it again. It's the one where she says: "I'm a mother first, a woman afterwards!"

[*They are all moving toward the door.*]

MARTHA (*realizing what Mike has said, laughs a little hysterically*). Why, that's funny, isn't it!

[*Ted puts out the light, and the door closes after them, as the curtain falls.*]

THE FRONT DOOR

By

BARBARA BUSSE

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CAST

MINNIE TOBIAS, *a spinster neighbor.*

EMMA JONES, *another neighbor.*

HENRY LEWIS, *widower of the woman whose body lies in a near-by room.*

MOLLY LEWIS, *their daughter.*

FRANK BAXTER, *the undertaker.*

SCENE. Kitchen in farmhouse, near Holdenville, Iowa, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of corn and good sturdy farm stock, a land of the people.

TIME. About noon on a summer day.

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The curtain rises on the kitchen of a large farmhouse. There is the bulky, dingy, complacent black range, the battered milk cans, standing sentinel-like under the big, linoleum-covered kitchen table, and a huge, white cupboard.

The room is large and inconveniently arranged, and modern improvements of any kind are conspicuous by their absence. There is no running water, no electric lights. The only sign of the present century in the whole room is a telephone, the long-necked wall variety. There are two doors to the room, one leading into the dining room and front part of the house in the back wall, left, and the other opening on the back porch, down stage, right.

In spite of the inconvenience and the lack of modern improvements in the kitchen, there is a dignity to the room — a dignity of clean, shiny floor, of snowy curtains at the window, of a bright red geranium blooming in an equally bright red pot on the window sill, and of faded, spotlessly clean rag rugs on the floor. The room is sunny and cheerful, well lived-in.

At the present time the table and cupboard are crowded with jars, baskets, and paper sacks of food. The shiny, fudge-brown, chocolate cake, a jar of peach pickles, a plate of ice-box cookies are all there. It is the scene evidently of either a wedding or a funeral. At no other time do the neighbors provide quite so much nourishment.

At the sink, peeling brilliantly red tomatoes, is Emma Jones. The manner in which she vigorously and efficiently attacks the pile of tomatoes beside her reveals the quality of her energetic soul. She is a large-bosomed, wide-hipped woman in a crisp wash-dress, almost completely covered with a starched white apron, which crackles as she moves. Her bouncing jet earrings bob up and down

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merrily as she talks, reflecting the shine of her black, twinkling eyes, creased into oblong slits by her fat cheeks.

At the kitchen cabinet, Minnie Tobias is cutting bread for sandwiches. She is a spinster now in her fiftieth year, a fact which she bravely but rather futilely tries to live down. She is the closest neighbor of the Lewises. Her voice is a mournful whine, reedy to match a mournful and reedy nature. She prides herself on being a good neighbor, a good citizen, and a good woman. In appearance she is thin with the pathetic thinness of a life of single-blessedness. Her gray eyes are mournful. She has, however, by some means, retained from girlhood a delicate, patrician air, perhaps because of her narrow, high-bridged nose, on which is perched firmly a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, and because of her narrow, thin, transparent-looking hands, and her high-arched, oxford-shod feet.

EMMA (*briskly dipping tomato she is peeling into pan of water and shaking it*). Land sakes! A body can't even have running water around here.

MINNIE (*dolefully*). Poor Laura! How she stood it all these years I don't see!

EMMA (*shortly*). Well, I can say one thing. I wouldn't be here now if it weren't that I wanted to do something for *her*. I never seemed to get around to it when she was — here.

MINNIE (*wiping eyes self-consciously*). We were neighbors for a good many years, and there wasn't a day she wasn't over with a piece of cake, or some ice-box cookies, or a piece of apple pie. My! But she could make good pie, a crust that just melted in your mouth.

EMMA. There wasn't anything she could do for other people that was too much for her. (*Softly.*) She saved my Jimmy's life when the doctors said he wouldn't live until morning.

MINNIE. I remember.

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EMMA. He was awful sick, and all I could do was cry and beg them to do something, anything so he'd get well. They said there wasn't anything to do.

MINNIE (*sagely*). All doctors are alike. They don't care.

EMMA. Then Laura just stepped in and worked all night on him, and by morning he was peaceful as anything. The fever was broken; now he's as strong and husky as any of them.

MINNIE (*choking*). And she . . . she's lying in there . . .

EMMA (*softly*). I know her soul's in heaven. She was an angel right here on earth.

[*There is a silence. Finally Minnie breaks it more matter-of-factly.*]

MINNIE. Don't she look pretty though, lying there with all those flowers? Usually people that die of typhoid look awful. My cousin Lefty's wife died of . . .

EMMA (*stopping her cutting and turning around to face Minnie while she talks. She emphasizes her remarks with the paring knife*). I always claimed, as perhaps I shouldn't now that she's dead, that it was her own fault Henry didn't treat her right. She spoiled him something awful, waiting on him and slaving for him.

MINNIE. Goodness knows Henry could have afforded plenty of help. I think it was plain wicked of him to let her kill herself on this big ranch of a farm all these years.

EMMA (*goes to cupboard to get plate on which to slice tomatoes. Examines jar of peach pickles on way*). My! These are nice peach pickles Mary sent over. I wonder how she keeps them so firm.

MINNIE. She sent those nice strawberry preserves too. (*Sighing.*) All I'm going to let myself say is that I don't see how Laura stood . . . that man . . . for twenty-five years. Seems to me the least he could have done was finish the front door.

EMMA. Or put in plumbing. I guess if he'd had to carry

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in the water from the pump that many years he'd have had running water inside here long ago.

MINNIE (*with a wisdom of marriage that is always the attribute of the unmarried*). I still think she should have trained him different. There's no getting around it. She should have got him into the habit of doing things for her from the very day they was married.

EMMA. You can just bet all the eggs your best Buff Orpington laid this last week that I've got him humping for *me* this morning if the funeral *is* to be tomorrow afternoon. He's out getting some water for me right now.

MINNIE. I will say for him he seems to feel real bad about Laura. He'll miss her. (*Sighing and wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron.*) Poor, dear Laura! I guess it's his fault that her life wasn't the happiest in the world. I'm not one to talk, but I've been her nearest neighbor for the past twen . . . all these years, and believe me, I could tell you a thing or two that most people don't know, if I'd a mind to. Our farms aren't so far apart that you can't help seeing . . . things.

EMMA (*returning to sink and beginning to slice tomatoes on plate*). My! My! Of course I've heard just what everyone else knows. I didn't . . .

MINNIE (*kneading butter to make it spread easier*). Well, I don't suppose Henry Lewis is exactly a bad man, but he's certainly the unkindest one I've ever met. If he ever spoke an extra word, to say nothing of a kind one, to Laura from morning to night I never heard it. I must say . . .

[*Steps can be heard on the back porch.*]

EMMA. Shh! Here he comes!

[*There is a painful silence as Henry Lewis walks lumberingly into the room, carrying a pail of water which he places on a small table beside the sink. Both women are a little fussed and red. Henry is a man of the soil, earthy, a mountain of a man with the brooding silence of a moun-*

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tain. His big, work-squared shoulders are bowed with the inarticulate pain of a silent man, who, when mortally wounded, can make no outcry.

HENRY. Here's your water, Emma.

[Dumbly his brown eyes, glazed with pain like those of an injured dog that can make no noise but silently suffers, fasten themselves on the floor at his feet as he sits slowly in a chair by the table. He is dressed in his best clothes, and his strong hands, wide and built for hard work, are pathetically crossed in his lap in their enforced idleness.]

EMMA (who recovers first). Thank you, Henry. Jane Freeman came over with this chocolate cake while you were outside. She says her ma is right broken up over poor Laura's . . . passing away.

[Henry remains unhappily silent, his face set in lines of pain.]

MINNIE. And Mrs. Bascomb 'phoned; said she was going to come over this afternoon to help.

EMMA. Not that there's anything much she can do, but I suppose she thought it would look more neighborly like.

MINNIE (*washing hands at sink*). My! Ain't it hot! I think I'll make some lemonade, and then you and Molly can eat. (*'Phone on wall rings, making them all jump with its unexpected clamor.*) I'll go. (*At 'phone.*) Hello, hello. This is Minnie Tobias. Henry's right . . . Oh, Mr. Baxter, I didn't recognize your voice. (*Simpering sweetly.*) Just a minute, and I'll ask him. (*Placing hand over mouthpiece.*) It's Mr. Baxter, Henry. He wants to know if he can come out. He wants to get a list of the relatives so he can arrange for the cars. And he wondered what music . . .

HENRY (*unable to stand conversation about the funeral*). Tell him he can come any time he damn pleases! *[Rushes out the kitchen door.]*

EMMA. Well!

[She freezes the atmosphere with this one word.]

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MINNIE (*considerably annoyed and not a little nonplussed*).

Yes, Mr. Baxter. He says . . . to come . . . any time.

[*She hangs up. There is a silence freighted with thoughts left unsaid. Then Emma speaks.*]

EMMA. Is Molly still up in her room?

MINNIE (*taking sack of lemons out of cupboard*). Yes, poor thing! She's taken her mother's death awfully hard.

EMMA. She's probably crying her eyes out this very minute. It would be better for her if she'd stay down here and meet folks. (*Goes to kitchen door, swings it open, and yells.*) Molly! Molly!

MINNIE (*shocked*). For goodness sakes, Emma, have you gone clean crazy? Hollering at the top of your lungs with Laura a-lying in the next room.

EMMA (*sighs*). I'll go get her. 'Tain't good for her to brood. (*While she is gone, Minnie fidgets around, putting sandwiches on plate. Surreptitiously she takes a cookie from the table and just manages to gulp it down when Emma returns again.*) Poor thing had been crying all right, but she said she'd come down as soon as she'd freshened up a bit.

MINNIE (*squeezing lemons*). Pretty thing, ain't she?

EMMA. And just as sweet as she is pretty. Somehow, in spite of everything, Laura always seemed awful happy having her and doing for other people and working with her flowers. Besides this house is as nice as most of them . . . around here . . . from the outside anyway.

MINNIE. Except for the front door. I'm sure I wouldn't want a house without a finished front door. (*Sniffing as she sits down with a sigh on the kitchen stool.*)

EMMA (*tastes lemonade and puts more sugar in it. Sitting down now, too*). Queer how he never finished it, wasn't it? Seems sorta heathenish never to have a front door.

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MINNIE. It is heathenish. Of course, not many people know the true story of the whole affair. But I, livin' so close and all . . .

EMMA. Everyone just always laid it up to natural cussedness. 'Course there's been talk . . .

MINNIE. And none of it true.

EMMA. Some said it was 'cause he's so tight.

MINNIE (*settling back comfortably for a nice gossip*). Land knows he's tight enough, but it wasn't that this time. It happened when the workmen was finishing the house fifteen years ago . . .

EMMA. Fifteen years! My! It hasn't seemed that long since Henry had this house built.

MINNIE. He thought the workmen was poking along so they could get more money, so he went out and cussed them out about it. The foreman sassed him back . . .

EMMA. Gracious! I'd a-thought he'd a-been afraid to.

MINNIE. And Henry lost his temper and fired every last one of them on the spot. They left without ever fixing the front door, and he boarded it up.

EMMA. And it's been just exactly like they left it from that day to this. What a pity!

MINNIE. Well, if you knew how Laura hankered to have that door finished all these years you'd think it was a greater pity.

EMMA. What are you talking about, Minnie Tobias?

MINNIE. Promise not to tell a soul?

EMMA (*stoutly*). Of course not!

MINNIE. I've always known it, though Laura was too proud ever to say anything about it even to Henry, until I came over here with some beef broth the afternoon before she . . . when she was so sick, and she as much as told me then that if her casket . . .

[*The dining room door swings open slowly and Molly enters. She is sweet, young, and virginal. She is flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, "sweet as the roses in June" according to Frank Baxter, proprietor of Holdenville's sole furniture*

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and undertaking establishment. Her eyes are red-rimmed now as if she has been crying for a long time.

MOLLY. Please, Mrs. Jones, I don't feel like eating anything. (*Dramatizing herself a little, as youth does.*)

I don't . . . think I'll ever want anything to eat again.

[*She is crying a little again, softly as if she is almost cried out. Minnie goes to her and takes her in her arms very gently.*]

MINNIE (*murmuring softly*). There! There! You mustn't take on like this!

EMMA (*patting her shoulder*). Poor child! You'll make yourself sick.

[*They bustle around Molly, put her in a chair, making her comfortable. Molly blows her nose with her sodden wad of a handkerchief and tries to smile at them.*]

MINNIE. There, honey, just sit down and make yourself comfortable.

EMMA. 'Tain't no sense cryin'; just makes your eyes all red.

MOLLY (*in a very little voice*). My! But you're nice to me!

MINNIE (*blowing her nose very hard to cover her emotion*).

Pshaw! I ain't done nothing a-tall.

MOLLY (*glancing around*). Where's pa?

EMMA (*dryly*). Your pa went outside. He didn't seem to like our company.

MINNIE (*going to kitchen door and looking out*). It's time he came in and ate something. I guess he can stand our company if we fix some food for him.

[*She goes to table and begins clearing it. There is a knock at the kitchen door, and without waiting for an answer, Frank Baxter, the undertaker, enters. He is a short, fat man, red-faced and consciously cheerful. For twenty years he has been burying the citizens of Holdenville and he has acquired a homely philosophy of living that recognizes and includes death.*]

FRANK. Hello! Hello, folks! It's the prettiest summer

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day you ever seen outside. (*Patting Molly's shoulder gently.*) Your ma's flower garden is pretty as a picture. (*Softly.*) That'll be your job now: keeping her flowers.

MOLLY (*getting up and walking to window*). They'll never grow for me the way they did for her. They seemed to love her and want to grow for her. Seemed like they used to nod and bow to her when she walked in the garden.

EMMA. Well, all I have to say is there wasn't a sweeter woman on God's green earth than Laura Lewis. And if she doesn't have the nicest funeral and the most flowers of any burial in Holdenville yet, then it's because I'm dead and in my grave too. Any woman that loved them flowers like Laura did should have enough she could be buried in them, instead of sod, if necessary.

MINNIE. And she ain't going to be carried out the b . . . (*Suddenly realizing that Molly is still in the room.*) Molly, you run out and tell your pa to come on in and eat. We're just going to feed you some sandwiches and cake and things. It's too hot for a big meal.

MOLLY (*sullenly, almost as if she is afraid*). I don't want to. He can come in when he gets hungry.

FRANK (*worried*). Honey, what's the matter? You oughtn't to feel that way about your own pa.

MOLLY. I don't care. He's so . . . so . . . Oh, I'll get him.

[*She walks listlessly to the door, pushing back the heavy mop of flaxen hair from her hot forehead as she does so.*]

FRANK (*sighs*). Poor young one! (*Briskly.*) Well, I've got no time to be gabbing along here. I got to get back right away. Has Henry made out a list of the relatives?

MINNIE (*seizing his arm fiercely*). See here, Frank Baxter, we got to figure some way to have Laura's casket go out the front door instead of the back.

FRANK (*stopping and taking cookie from table and eating*

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it). Lookee here, Minnie, I ain't no magician. That front door's boarded up.

MINNIE. I don't care! It can be unboarded and finished, I guess.

EMMA. What for, Minnie? You know Henry'll never do it, not now anyway. He'll say it costs too much.

MINNIE. Well, he's going to! I've been trying to get you two together, alone, to tell you, ever since she . . . passed on. I was over here that last afternoon, and them were her last words to me.

EMMA (*impatiently*). What? What were her last words?

MINNIE (*impressively*). This is exactly what she said to me, and her so sick she couldn't talk above a whisper: "I could go happy if I thought I'd be carried out the front door." For fifteen years she's wished and pined to have that front door finished even though she was too proud to say anything even to me, her nearest neighbor. Now, that she's . . . gone, I guess she can have her way for once. She asked me to help her, and I'm going to see that that front door gets fixed.

FRANK. Gosh, Minnie, I didn't know. Shucks, if she wanted it that bad, I guess we can fix it some way.

EMMA (*practically*). But how? I wouldn't tell Henry Lewis for the world that . . .

MINNIE (*nervously shoving chair under table*). I thought maybe . . . Frank . . . Mr. . . .

FRANK (*embarrassed*). Aw, pshaw! I can't . . . (*Slapping his knee.*) I ain't one to tell a lie, but this time I think the end justifies the means. I'll just tell Henry that the casket won't go out the back door. Then I guess he'll have to finish the front door.

EMMA. Do you think he'll swallow it?

MINNIE (*triumphantly*). Of course, he will. I guess that'll fix him.

EMMA (*nervously to Frank*). You better go on in there now and pretend to be a-measuring it. (*Approaching*

THE FRONT DOOR

footsteps on the back porch.) They're a-coming now.
Go on!

[Frank disappears through dining room door as Henry and Molly enter through back door. Henry has regained his composure, and now it's Emma and Minnie who are flustered. Both concentrate on finishing setting the table.

EMMA (*cutting three slices of the chocolate cake*). Well, well, where'd you find him, Molly?

MOLLY. He was working in the flower garden.

HENRY (*apologetically*). There was some weeds after the rain last night, so I thought maybe I'd . . .

[He remains dangling in the air in his incoherence, and the two women leave him there. Molly is silent.

MINNIE (*placing plate of sandwiches on table*). There, I guess you can set to. If you want more cake, I'll cut more, but there's no sense cutting it if you're not going to eat it. It just dries out.

EMMA (*sitting down on kitchen stool on which she looks like an elephant on a pumpkin*). Frank Baxter's here, Henry, in the other room. He wants a list of the relatives.

HENRY. Saw his car outside. The list is already made out . . . in on the table.

EMMA (*briskly, getting up*). I'll go get it and give it to him.

[Henry has taken up a sandwich in his hand and has begun eating it mechanically. It is plain that he, like Molly, is not hungry. The women watch him silently. Suddenly he pushes back his plate.

HENRY. Guess I ain't so hungry after all.

[He shifts chair away from table, and sits, silent and uncomfortable in his best clothes. His strong hands are clasped in front of him so tightly that the knuckles show white. His legs are apart, and his elbows resting on his knees, throwing his body forward in a position of restlessness. Minnie sniffs contemptuously, but there is no other sound in the room. Emma returns.

THE FRONT DOOR

EMMA. I gave it to him.

[There is another embarrassing silence in which no one can think of anything to say.]

EMMA. My, Henry, you ain't et a thing. You gotta eat to keep up your strength.

[There is another pause, when Frank enters briskly.]

FRANK. Howdy, Henry. Nice rain we had last night, wasn't it?

HENRY. Howdy, Frank.

FRANK. I guess everything's fixed except the music. Any preference? *(Henry remains silent.)* No. Hmmm! "Nearer My God To Thee" then, I guess . . . or "The Old Rugged Cross."

MINNIE. I think "Nearer My God To Thee" is nicest.

[Frank takes out tape-line and measures door.]

FRANK *(stopping to wipe perspiration from forehead. Sees bucket of water and stops work to take a dipper and get himself a drink of water)*. This well water sure is fine. Like to have a well just like it on my place. Hot, ain't it? *(No one answers him. The two women preserve a strained silence. Henry is silently brooding. Frank goes back to door and starts measuring it again.)* I thought maybe, just to make sure . . . I wouldn't want there to be any slips.

MINNIE *(fiercely)*. Nothing ain't too good or too much trouble for Laura.

[Henry is stirring restlessly. His eyes are tortured.]

FRANK. Pshaw! Now ain't that too bad!

EMMA *(slyly, a cat pouncing on a rat)*. What's the matter, Frank?

FRANK *(showing tapeline to Henry)*. Just a shame, that's what it is. Lookee here, Hank. I been a-measuring things, and that coffin won't go through this back door with the pallbearers and everything, not decent like.

HENRY *(without any apparent emotion)*. That's the only way out!

THE FRONT DOOR

FRANK. Spoils everything, that's what it does, maneuvering through a narrow door.

HENRY. Ain't time enough before tomorrow afternoon, anyway.

EMMA. Oh, I guess you could finish it all right if you worked with a night shift. I know my Elmer would be glad to come in and help if you can't get workers enough.

MINNIE. I guess my brother Will would be glad to come too.

HENRY (*briefly*). Costs too much! Besides, 'tain't no use . . . now.

FRANK. What do you mean — cost too much? Getting a good price for your hogs, ain't you? (*Henry remains stubbornly silent.*) Great Scott, man, ain't you got no pride?

HENRY. Sure, I got pride, but it ain't necessary.

[*He is like a huge St. Bernard dog being snapped at and hounded by fox terriers. No one has paid any attention to Molly until now when she rises, holding herself proudly erect, her eyes blazing, her cheeks pink.*]

MOLLY. I should think now that she's . . . dead, you could finish the front door. Mother's never had anything she wanted. She didn't have a piano, or running water, or electric lights. Maybe I oughtn't to blame you because, well, ma said I should love you and look after you, only *why* can't she have the thing she wanted worst of all, more than a piano even? All her life she slaved and worked and took care of you when she was too sick and frail to look out for her own self even. And now the thing she's talked and dreamed of ever since I can remember, you say costs too much. I think it's . . . wicked!

EMMA (*shocked at this exhibition of youthful rebellion*). Molly!

MOLLY (*turning, throws herself into a chair and buries her face in her arms on the table*). I don't care, I do! I do!

THE FRONT DOOR

HENRY (*rising slowly, dumbly. He looks helplessly around him, his face twitching. His inarticulateness is evidently torture*). Molly, Molly. I . . .

FRANK (*with a fineness of feeling sometimes to be found in the kindly and open-hearted*). If you don't mind, Hank, me and the womenfolks will clear out and leave you two alone.

[*Henry makes no sign of hearing him, and the three silently leave. Minnie gives Molly's shoulder a little pat as she crosses the room.*]

HENRY (*the veins are standing out in his forehead. His eyes are weary and strained*). Laura . . . your ma . . . was . . . I didn't know . . .

MOLLY (*with her head still in her arms*). I'm sorry, pa. I didn't mean to fly at you. I guess I know you loved her, in your way, only why can't you have the door fixed? (*Wearily.*) She wanted it so.

HENRY (*finding something not dealing with emotions makes him a little more articulate. The sorrow in his deep voice is infinite*). Why, honey, of course we'll have . . . the front door . . . fixed. You see, I . . . well, if I'd just known . . . I mean if she'd ever told me she wanted it that bad, I'd have fixed it . . . fifteen years ago.

[*His hand, heavy with years of work but gentle with a love he cannot express any other way falls caressingly, protectingly on the girl's slim shoulder.*]

Curtain

THE COUNT AND THE PIG

By

ELOISE EUBANK AND WILLIAM SHAPARD

CAST

BEAUCHAMP, *the Count's manservant.*

MARIE DE SALIGNY, *the Count's eldest sister.*

MATHILDE DE SALIGNY, *sister of the Count.*

HENRIETTE DE SALIGNY, *youngest sister of the Count.*

ALPHONSE DE SALIGNY, *French Ambassador to Texas.*

ABNER BULLOCK, *the Innkeeper's son.*

MR. BURNETT, *vice-president of the Republic of Texas.*

SCENE. The study of M. le Comte de Saligny in the French Embassy, Austin, Texas.

TIME. September, 1839.

THE COUNT AND THE PIG

It is morning.

Down left a door opens into the hall. At back there is a tall window at either side with heavy drapes, and between them a fireplace of native stone.

On the right wall hangs a large oval portrait of a de Saligny ancestor. A heavy French desk stands against the left wall, a large sofa down right, an armchair center.

As the curtain rises, Marie de Saligny is busily setting the desk in order. As she goes about her work, she pauses to ring a small bell on the desk. In a moment Beauchamp enters from the hall.

BEAUCHAMP (*at the door*). Yes, Mademoiselle Marie?

MARIE. Beauchamp, have you been to see about the mail this morning yet?

BEAUCHAMP. No, mademoiselle.

MARIE. Then go at once. Didn't Monsieur le Comte tell you he was expecting an important dispatch from Paris in the next mail? The coach should have been here an hour ago.

BEAUCHAMP. I have been very busy, mademoiselle.

MARIE (*annoyed*). I said this was important, Beauchamp! (*He does not go.*) Really, Beauchamp! What's come over you lately? You've been difficult this last week.

BEAUCHAMP (*with dignity*). Mademoiselle Marie, I have served you and your brother faithfully since I joined your service in England. I think I may safely say that I was indispensable to him at the British Embassy. I have done everything an English butler can do . . .

MARIE. This is no time for reminiscences. You know as

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well as I my brother's temper, and he wants the dispatch from Paris at the earliest possible moment.

BEAUCHAMP. Is it concerning the proposed loan of French francs to this — this Republic of Texas? Because if the French government is planning to send its good gold pieces to this uncivilized, uncouth . . .

MARIE. Beauchamp!

BEAUCHAMP. I will be no party to it.

MARIE. Well, really! Suppose you leave the affairs of state to Alphonse, and go about your business at once.

[*She dismisses him by continuing to straighten up the room.*]

BEAUCHAMP (*firmly*). Mademoiselle . . .

MARIE. And see that you clean yourself up. Your clothes are disgraceful. One would think you had been digging on your hands and knees.

BEAUCHAMP. Yes, mademoiselle, I have.

MARIE. You've what?

BEAUCHAMP. I've been replanting your favorite fleur-de-lis, the ones you brought from France and had set out in the bed below the gallery.

MARIE. But what . . . (*Suspiciously.*) You don't mean that . . .

BEAUCHAMP. Yes, mademoiselle. The pig!

MARIE (*enraged, rushing to the window*). Oh, how dare he! Three times those beautiful bulbs have been replanted. They will never grow! Those fine bulbs I brought with my own hands across the ocean, the first flowers ever planted at the Embassy!

BEAUCHAMP (*coming farther into the room*). I remember telling you they were too good for the barren soil of Texas.

MARIE (*unheeding*). And now, uprooted! For the third time by a filthy, low pig! Alphonse shall hear of this.

BEAUCHAMP (*patiently*). Yes, mademoiselle, you told him the first time and the second time.

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MARIE (*striding up and down the room*). He told that, that innkeeper Bullock to keep that beast in his pen. But no! It was right out again, and on our lawn. As though it weren't hard enough to try to have a garden where there has never been a garden before, without having a pig at my fleur-de-lis!

BEAUCHAMP. If I may make a suggestion, mademoiselle, the third offense makes it an affair of state.

MARIE. Alphonse shall speak to this Bullock person for the last time. We would never have had to put up with such indignities in France.

BEAUCHAMP. Ah, no, in France or in England, never! But here your innkeeper is your neighbor.

MARIE. Where is Alphonse?

BEAUCHAMP. In conference with this alleged government, mademoiselle. Might I say that I would like to give this innkeeper his warning personally this time? (*Grimly, as he goes.*) I will handle this.

MARIE. Wait, Beauchamp, that may be Alphonse now.
[*Mathilde rushes in.*]

MATHILDE. Ah, there you are, Marie! I hurried home as quickly as I could. (*Takes off her wraps and gives them to Beauchamp.*) Look! A letter from dear Lucille. It seems a year since we had news from Paris.

MARIE. A letter from Lucille? How faithful she is to remember us so often. Do open it at once!

BEAUCHAMP. Mademoiselle?

MARIE. Oh, Beauchamp, let the matter go for the moment. I will speak to Alphonse immediately on his return to the house.

BEAUCHAMP (*unable to hide his disgust*). Yes, mademoiselle.

MATHILDE (*seating herself on the sofa and opening the letter*). You may go. (*To Marie.*) Oh, I almost forgot, here is the dispatch.

[*She puts it beside her on the sofa.*]

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MARIE. The dispatch from Paris?

MATHILDE. Yes. Let's see. Lucille begins: "My dear sisters in a foreign land . . ."

MARIE. One moment, Mathilde. Beauchamp, you may finish replanting the bulbs.

BEAUCHAMP (*ominously*). This is the last time, mademoiselle.

[*Exit Beauchamp to hall.*]

MATHILDE. Planting bulbs?

MARIE. Mathilde, for the third time, that innkeeper's pig uprooted every . . .

MATHILDE. Not again!

MARIE. Again!

MATHILDE. No!

MARIE. Yes! And I've stood it for the last time. (*She sits beside Mathilde on the sofa.*) What does Lucille say? Do stop reading all the news to yourself!

MATHILDE. Just listen to this, Marie! "On Thursday we entertained the Duke and Duchess de Montpareil at dinner. The Duchess wore the very newest of creations, a divine yellow satin gown with heavy ruffles of yellow lace, caught up with clusters of pearls."

MARIE. How enchanting!

MATHILDE (*reading*). "How I envy you the freedom of a life in a gay, romantic new country, where even now you are establishing standards of manners and customs which you yourselves have always held most dear. You are of course in a position to dictate the fashions of the new nation." Oh, dear, do you think my new green silk is stunning enough to wear at our dinner tomorrow night, Marie?

MARIE. But of course.

MATHILDE. If we are to become established as leaders of fashion, we can't be too careful.

MARIE. Nonsense! Here there is no competition. How I envy Lucille the society of Paris.

MATHILDE. But listen to this: "Tell Henriette that young

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Jean St. Denis will never be happy again until Henriette returns and becomes his bride." (*Sighing.*) Dear boy, what a fine husband he will make for our Henriette.

MARIE. What more could she ask: family, position, riches, and he adores her. But Mathilde, I don't like her being here, so far away from him. You know what a silly young child she is.

MATHILDE. Oh, you are perfectly right. She is really too young to know her own mind, and I don't think it would be amiss to speak to her of Jean at every opportunity.

MARIE. Yes, in this country where it's almost impossible to keep Henriette from coming in contact with all sorts of people . . .

MATHILDE. Like . . . like that Abner Bullock . . .

MARIE. The innkeeper's son! So you've noticed it, too?

MATHILDE. Well, I hadn't mentioned it to you before, because it seemed such a trivial thing . . .

MARIE. Indeed, it isn't! Every time he comes to the house with provisions from the inn, she deliberately smiles at him, like a maidservant.

MATHILDE. Why, how disgraceful! And do you know what I discovered? She has added another verse to that song she is learning on the guitar. I heard her singing it last night in her room.

MARIE. What on earth was it?

MATHILDE (*looking around to be sure no one is listening; softly*).
"L'amour, l'amour,
Je chante toujours
De vous et Abner!"

MARIE (*shocked*). No!

MATHILDE. Yes! We really must speak to her at once. But Marie, it will do no good to storm at her. We'll go about it more subtly. We shall tell her about the news of Jean St. Denis. I think that's the best plan, remind her of him. This other is nothing; it couldn't be!

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MARIE. I hope not. But you know anything can happen here.

MATHILDE. I'll show you how to handle her. Where is Henriette?

MARIE (*crossing to the desk*). Beauchamp will find her. (*Rings the bell.*) The sooner we put an end to whatever silly, romantic notions she has about this horrible person the better.

MATHILDE. We must try to keep him from coming here.

MARIE. Try? I shall forbid him to! And of all people in the world, he would be the son of the low inn-keeper whose fine pig . . .

[*Enter Beauchamp.*]

BEAUCHAMP. Yes, mademoiselle?

MARIE. Fetch Mademoiselle Henriette immediately. She is likely in her room, writing.

[*Exit Beauchamp.*]

MATHILDE. Now don't get excited, Marie. Henriette can see nothing in this Abner. He is completely uneducated in the most simple of the social graces.

MARIE. Well, I do my best to keep Henriette as busy as possible with the things a young girl should be doing. If only I had Alphonse's support in forbidding her to play that guitar and sing those silly songs she writes constantly. And he does nothing about making her speak English while she is here, as we do. But no, he lets her do as she pleases. We should never have brought her with us to Texas.

[*Henriette is heard off stage, singing the little song she has written about Abner.*]

MATHILDE. You see! That's the song I meant.

[*Enter Henriette in a light party dress, still humming.*]

HENRIETTE. Ah, mes soeurs, quelle jour, quelle jour! Comme il fait beau, n'est-ce pas? (*She has crossed to the windows at the back.*) J'espère que tu ne veux pas que je répète mes leçons ce matin, Marie! Je n'avais pas étudié un seul moment!

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MARIE. Stop this foolishness, Henriette; speak in English.

HENRIETTE. Je n'aime pas l'anglais, et je ne le parlerai pas!

MARIE. Henriette! Come here! Why are you dressed like this in the morning?

MATHILDE. It's such bad taste.

MARIE. Besides, it's fall! (*With disgust.*) A dimity in September!

HENRIETTE. Mais il fait chaud.

MARIE. Whether it's warm or cold has nothing to do with it! A lady in your position dresses according to the season, not the temperature!

HENRIETTE. Ah, mais ça c'est pour Paris. Nous sommes maintenant au Texas!

MARIE. Will you speak English!

MATHILDE. Let me handle this, Marie. Chérie, this morning we received a letter from Lucille!

HENRIETTE (*absentmindedly*). Ah?

MATHILDE. Did you hear what I said? A letter, from Paris!

HENRIETTE. Oh.

MARIE. We sit here in this wilderness for a month with no news, and all she can say is "Oh"! (*Ominously.*) Sometimes I think . . .

MATHILDE. Marie!

MARIE. Where is my needlework? I've no more time to waste on nothing!

HENRIETTE (*brightly, hoping to get Marie out of the room*). Il est dans le salon, Marie.

[*She points off left. Marie gives her a nasty look and leaves indignantly, slamming the door.*]

MATHILDE. Come here, dear, sit beside me. Henriette, I know you aren't very interested in fashions (*Slyly.*) but there is something in Lucille's letter that you'll want to hear, something for your ears alone, really.

HENRIETTE. Oui?

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[*She is still standing.*]

MATHILDE. Yes. Of course Marie and I miss our daily drives along the Champs Elysees and the shops and the opera, but *I* understand that *you* miss somebody; and he misses you, too!

HENRIETTE. Pardon?

MATHILDE (*impatiently*). Quelqu'un te manque!

HENRIETTE. Qui?

MATHILDE. Ah, you can't fool your sister! Listen to this: (*Reading from the letter.*) "Jean will never be happy again until Henriette returns and becomes his bride."

HENRIETTE (*uninterested*). Ah, Jean . . .

MATHILDE. I knew you would be happy to hear of Jean again! I wish I had met such a splendid example of a young man when I was younger. How faithful he has been, Henriette!

HENRIETTE. Il a une chevelure de carotte.

MATHILDE. Ah, yes, the most beautiful red hair I've ever seen on a manly head. And you'll be mistress of the Chateau de St. Denis. Think of the servants and wealth at your disposal. You'll be able to have hundreds of beautiful dresses, and jewels . . .

HENRIETTE (*a little interested; sitting on the stool at Mathilde's feet*). C'est vrai.

MATHILDE. I can see you now in your box at the opera, the cynosure of hundreds of admiring eyes. And how lovely it will be on your morning rides through the Bois to have people turn and say: "She is Henriette de St. Denis, the loveliest woman in all Paris. Her husband gives her everything."

[*Marie enters, and seeing Henriette thus enthralled, smiles approvingly at Mathilde.*]

MARIE (*sitting in the chair at center*). You'll be able to travel anywhere you wish with Jean.

MATHILDE. Oh, yes! It's just like a story book, like Violette in "L'Amour Eternelle."

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HENRIETTE. Ah, la pauvre Violette!

[*She rises and wanders to the window at back.*]

MATHILDE. But you would have only happiness with Jean.

MARIE (*to Mathilde*). Henriette should answer Jean right away.

MATHILDE (*smiling, to Marie*). Henriette realizes there is only one Jean.

MARIE. I can see that your little chat has been very successful.

MATHILDE. Yes, I feel that everything is settled.

MARIE. At last!

[*Henriette begins to play and sing: "L'amour, l'amour, je chante toujours . . ."*]

MATHILDE (*amazed*). Henriette!

MARIE (*dropping her sewing*). If you don't stop . . .

[*Enter Alphonse, Comte de Saligny, cheerily.*]

ALPHONSE. Ah, good morning, my dears, good morning! What a charming day. September, too! (*He kisses each of them in turn.*) Fancy how chill we should be in Paris!

MATHILDE (*crossing to him*). Alphonse, there is something we must speak to you about.

MARIE. Yes, this is very serious and I want you to put your foot down.

ALPHONSE (*crossing to center*). Before lunch? Please, my lovely sisters, let us postpone this discussion until later.

MARIE. But Alphonse, you are always postponing these matters.

MATHILDE. And so we never get to talk to you about them.

ALPHONSE. Now don't worry your pretty heads about anything. I want you to enjoy yourselves here. Stop fretting.

MARIE. Easy enough for you to say!

ALPHONSE (*going up to Henriette*). Ah, Henriette, how nice you look. Like a sweet flower, is she not, Marie?

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MARIE. Hmmm. Well, it's about our little flower that I want to speak to you.

ALPHONSE. Ah, then I know it can't be serious, for Henriette is the picture of health and seems to enjoy Texas more than any of us. Eh, my dear?

HENRIETTE. Mais oui!

MARIE. There, you see, in French always!

ALPHONSE. In *English*, my little rabbit. And what have you been doing to amuse yourself this morning?

HENRIETTE. Rien. Mathilde m'a lu une lettre de Lucille.

ALPHONSE. A letter from Lucille! (*Coming down to Mathilde.*) Then surely . . .

MATHILDE (*crossing to the sofa*). Yes, from dear Lucille. Here it is.

[*Starts to read from it.*]

ALPHONSE (*looking on the desk*). But was there no letter from our brother-in-law, M. Humann? Was there only one letter? What about the loan? Surely Lucille mentioned the loan. Why haven't I heard from M. Humann?

MATHILDE. Calm yourself, dear brother. I brought the dispatch. It was here a moment ago. It couldn't be lost. Now let me see; I came in, and I put it . . . I thought I put it on the desk.

ALPHONSE. Where? Where? (*Marie gets up.*) Why can't I be told these things? Important letters of state are thrown around like shopping lists. Have you no idea of the importance of this? I cannot understand . . .

MARIE. Well, I'm looking for it. Don't make such a fuss. Personally, I cannot think the French government is insane enough to send money to this place.

ALPHONSE. It's not here; you've lost it!

MARIE (*finding it where Mathilde had left it*). Here it is.

ALPHONSE (*calmer*). Thank you, my dear. Ah, now for the news. (*Reads to himself, muttering out loud as he does so.*) Yes. Yes. Hmmm. To be sure.

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But . . . Yes, yes. Ah, Marie, Mathilde, success is mine. The loan will go through.

MATHILDE. Oh, Alphonse, congratulations. What does he say?

MARIE. Really!

ALPHONSE. M. Humann says that the French bankers, with government sanction, of course, are willing to advance the thirty-seven million francs to Texas. And do you know why? Because, solely because it is I who recommends it.

MATHILDE. Let me see, Alphonse. Does he really say that?

ALPHONSE. More or less. And at any rate, it is settled when I have talked to the Texas government. Ah, they'll know now what it is to have an Ambassador with such influence.

MARIE. I'm sure they know already.

ALPHONSE. Ah, my dear sister, how wise you are. We must celebrate this history-making occasion. But how?

MATHILDE. I know!

ALPHONSE. Yes, Mathilde?

MATHILDE. The dinner tomorrow night! Don't say anything about this until the dinner. What a coup for any dinner party!

ALPHONSE. You are right. The formal announcement should come at a royal celebration at the Embassy.

MARIE (*sitting on the sofa again*). How we are going to have a fine dinner party here is more than I can see!

ALPHONSE. We shall manage. You'll see. I told the innkeeper to send his boy up here to let us know what we can get.

MATHILDE. Oh, that awful boy, Alphonse.

MARIE. That is what we were trying to tell you before.

ALPHONSE. But what? About the Bullock boy? True, he is somewhat gauche, but what is that to you, my dear?

MARIE. Alphonse, have you no eyes? Do you never

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know what is going on around you? For weeks Henriette has been mooning and moping about the house, singing love songs, and to whom? Abner Bullock! Oh, I could die of mortification. A common innkeeper's son!

ALPHONSE (*mildly astonished*). Henriette!

MARIE. Now what do you say to that?

ALPHONSE (*crossing to center*). My dears, you concern yourselves needlessly, I'm sure.

MARIE. How can you be so blind? She no longer thinks of Jean, but of *him*! If that match should fail . . .

ALPHONSE. Oh, you exaggerate. Please leave the whole thing to me and you will see what will happen!

MARIE. I *know* what will happen.

ALPHONSE. Yes?

MARIE. Yes! Nothing will happen!

ALPHONSE. These are petty things that will settle themselves. You seem to forget that I am the representative of the French government in Texas, and have important affairs of state that must be attended to.

MARIE. Very well, then. Perhaps this will interest you. This morning the soil of the French state in Texas was invaded again. The pig that belongs to that innkeeper Bullock, whose son you see fit for Henriette to make friends with, uprooted and trampled the whole bed of fleur-de-lis that I brought from your ancestral chateau.

ALPHONSE. They have dared to allow that beast to come on this property again after I warned them that the next time I'll report this to the government of Texas! You heard the warning I gave Bullock?

MARIE. Yes, I remember.

ALPHONSE (*crossing left*). He'll explain this! He'll explain to me this time, the French Ambassador.

[*Abner has appeared at the window. Henriette is motioning him away, pointing to her brother and gesturing, "Go away quickly"; but he does not understand.*]

MATHILDE (*sitting in the center chair*). I think you really

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ought to do something definite, Alphonse, or this same annoyance may go on indefinitely.

ALPHONSE (*at left*). Wait until I see him! I shall go now and settle this once and for all with that innkeeper.

MARIE. Will you please speak to Henriette first. (*She sees Abner at the window.*) Ohh! Henriette! Alphonse! Go away, you! Alphonse, it's he!

ALPHONSE (*bellowing*). You! What are you doing here? Why are you standing there like a nincompoop?

ABNER. You told me to come, sir.

ALPHONSE (*going toward the window*). Haven't you enough sense to come to the door, the back door?

ABNER (*a little embarrassed*). No, sir. Yes, sir.

MARIE. Henriette, come here at once.

[*Henriette does not move.*]

MATHILDE. You asked him to come about the food for the dinner, Alphonse.

ALPHONSE (*coming down front*). I've changed my mind. We will buy nothing from Bullock, nothing whatsoever. (*Turns to Abner.*) And you may tell that to your father. And the next time . . .

MARIE. Go to your room, Henriette.

HENRIETTE. Non!

MATHILDE. Alphonse, there is only one inn. If we are to have a dinner party at all . . .

ALPHONSE. Of course we will entertain at dinner. Aren't the invitations issued?

MARIE. Well, unless we are to have nothing but gruel, we shall have to buy somewhere.

ABNER (*meekly*). I brought a list from papa.

ALPHONSE. A list? What list? Don't stand there like a zany! Come in!

ABNER (*coming through the window*). Yes, sir.

[*He stands just inside, very much ill at ease.*]

ALPHONSE (*going up to him*). Is it you who is supposed to take care of your father's animals?

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ABNER. Uh-huh. There's a pen back of the inn where . . .

ALPHONSE. I don't care where the pen is! Why haven't you attended to your duties? Why did you let that beast, that great pig break out again? Do you know that he's ruined the flower beds again?

ABNER. No, sir.

MARIE (*unable to keep out of it any longer*). Well, he has. Only this morning . . .

MATHILDE. Marie!

ALPHONSE. Didn't you know he was out? Where is the beast now?

ABNER. I caught him again this morning and shut him up. I didn't know he was out again, but he's in again now, sir. I'll watch him.

ALPHONSE. If you don't . . . (*Abner drops a package he has been holding.*) What is that?

ABNER. It's just . . . well, I thought Miss Henry-ette might like it.

MARIE. What is it? Hand it to me.

ABNER (*crossing to the sofa with it*). Yes, ma'am.

[*He hands it to her and backs up.*]

MARIE. You see, Alphonse, he brings her things now, and all this is going on . . . (*She has unwrapped the package. It is a dead chicken.*) Ohhhhhh!

[*Jumping up and letting the chicken fall.*]

MATHILDE. Ugh!

MARIE. Take it away!

HENRIETTE (*coming down back of the sofa*). Ah, le pauvre petit, mort!

ABNER. It's only a chicken.

ALPHONSE. Remove it at once, do you hear!

ABNER (*hastily picking it up*). Yes, sir.

[*He starts toward the front window with it.*]

ALPHONSE. Out the back way!

ABNER (*thoroughly confused*). Yes, sir. (*He starts*

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toward the hall door, carrying the dead bird by the legs.

Turning.) Oh, here's the list you wanted.

ALPHONSE. Very well. Marie, take the list.

[Abner hands it to her.

MARIE (*crossing to Abner and taking the list quickly*).

What is this?

HENRIETTE. Il se peut que je puisse le lire.

MATHILDE. Henriette!

ABNER. Well, papa scratched out the things he don't have, and can't git.

MATHILDE (*looking over Marie's shoulder*). It's nothing but scratches.

MARIE. You mean to say that all that is available at that inn is pork?

ALPHONSE. Pork or not, remove that dead bird, young man! Go!

ABNER. Yes, sir.

[He exits with speed through the hall door.

MARIE (*going to the sofa*). Dinner party! Dinner! And there is no meat in Austin but pork! (*She sits down wearily.*) Ohhhh.

HENRIETTE. Il y a aussi du poulet.

MATHILDE. Don't mention chicken again, Henriette!

ALPHONSE (*coming down stage*). We'll have the dinner party just the same. If a Frenchwoman isn't ingenious enough to prepare an acceptable dinner, no matter what is available, then she no longer deserves the name of Frenchwoman.

MARIE. That Bullock person probably just won't go to the trouble of getting anything else.

ALPHONSE. We will have pork, and a dinner party worthy of France, despite the Bullocks.

[Enter Beauchamp.

BEAUCHAMP. M'sieu, the Vice-President is here.

ALPHONSE. Ah, M'sieu Burnett! One moment. Marie, I should like to speak to Burnett in peace. Please see that we are not disturbed.

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MARIE. Very well, Alphonse. But I hope you will speak to him about the pig.

MATHILDE. Yes, I think he might be able to stop all this nonsense.

ALPHONSE. Don't tell me what to do. I'll handle the situation; so rest assured that you have all heard the last of that pig.

HENRIETTE (*to Alphonse*). Puis-je rester, Alphonse? Je serai muette absolument et il fait si gentil ici. Permettez-moi de rester, je vous prie!

ALPHONSE. Very well, you may stay. Remember to speak English. (*Henriette returns to the window. To Beauchamp.*) Show M'sieu Burnett in.

[*Exit Beauchamp.*]

MATHILDE (*as she and Marie rise to go*). I have never met the Vice-President of Texas, so . . .

[*Enter Beauchamp and Burnett.*]

BEAUCHAMP. Mister Burnett.

[*He remains by the door.*]

ALPHONSE (*crossing to meet him*). Ah, good day, M'sieu Burnett.

BURNETT. Good morning, Count. Sorry, I couldn't get to the meeting this morning.

ALPHONSE. Marie, Mathilde, Henriette: M'sieu Burnett. M'sieu, my sisters.

[*They all curtsey and murmur, "How do you do."*]

BURNETT (*coming to center*). I've been looking forward to this pleasure, but the business of Texas keeps us so busy these days that a man hasn't much time to make social calls.

MATHILDE. We are looking forward to entertaining you at dinner tomorrow night, M'sieu.

MARIE. Yes!

BURNETT. It will certainly be a pleasure to come to the Embassy.

[*Beauchamp sees something out the window. He stiffens and looks about the room, and as the conversation con-*

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tinues, calmly and quietly steps forward in the room, and removes a large pistol from the wall over the desk, no one noticing.

MARIE (*as she picks up her sewing*). Henriette, I think you had better come with us.

HENRIETTE. Mais, non, je préfère rester ici. Il m'a permis.

MATHILDE (*apologetically*). Henriette speaks in French when she is at home.

ALPHONSE. Of course you may remain, Henriette. It will be quite all right.

[*Abner comes in from the hall, and halts abruptly.*]

ABNER. Oh, good morning, Mister Burnett.

BURNETT (*turning*). Well, if it isn't Abner Bullock. (*Abner comes into the room and they shake hands.*)

What are you doing here, Abner? It isn't a pretty girl in this house that brings you to the Embassy, is it?

ABNER (*embarrassed*). No, sir, I . . . I . . . uh . . . papa sent a list back.

BURNETT. Of course, I might have known it was business!

ABNER (*thoroughly ill at ease*). Do you want the pork?

MARIE. I shall order later. I will send word to the inn by Beauchamp. That will be all.

ALPHONSE. You may go, young man.

ABNER (*crossing awkwardly to the door*). Well, I . . . I . . . reckon I'll go, I guess. Good-bye!

[*He makes a hasty exit into the hall. Henriette runs to the window and leans out.*]

MARIE. Good day, M'sieu Burnett.

MATHILDE. Good-bye, until tomorrow evening.

BURNETT. Good morning, ladies.

[*They go out. Beauchamp follows with a look of resolution on his face as he firmly closes the door after them.*]

ALPHONSE. Beauchamp!

BEAUCHAMP (*reappearing*). Yes, M'sieu?

ALPHONSE. We are not to be disturbed.

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BEAUCHAMP. As far as possible, sir.

[He closes the door.]

ALPHONSE. Do sit down, M'sieu Burnett. Well, I am happy to say that this morning, as I hoped, I received the dispatch from Paris.

BURNETT (*sitting in the large chair*). Only seven weeks! Well, that's pretty fast service.

ALPHONSE (*taking a seat at the desk*). My brother-in-law, M'sieu Humann, the Minister of Finance, has written me in great detail, saying that with my recommendation he will advise the French bankers to forward the loan of thirty-seven million francs to Texas.

BURNETT. Why, that's fine, Count. France is doing a great thing for this infant Republic of ours.

ALPHONSE. It is my pleasure to have a part in this transaction, M'sieu.

BURNETT. Well, if it weren't for you, Count, it sure would have been a job to get in touch with the right people in Paris.

ALPHONSE. Of course it is fortunate that I am able to use my influence. I will admit there are few who would have been able to carry this proposition through.

BURNETT. We are fully aware of that, Count, and Texas will always be very grateful.

[Abner appears at the window, much to Henriette's delight. They are both a little embarrassed, and smile at each other. Abner hangs on the sill.]

ALPHONSE. Yes, M'sieu, and with your permission, I will proceed at once to put in writing my approval, which, when it is received in Paris, will be all that is necessary.

[He gets pen and paper, and with great ceremony begins to write. At the window Henriette takes a piece of notepaper and begins writing a note to Abner. He looks puzzled, as he knows no French, but he also writes something and gives it back to her. She presses it to her heart. Meanwhile:]

BURNETT (*rising, and walking up and down the room*).

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Your government's loan will be invaluable, Count. With this much cash, there will be no trouble in obtaining a charter and the immediate establishment of a central bank, which I feel is a real necessity to the state, particularly at this time.

ALPHONSE (*writing*). HmMMM. Yes, of course . . . by all means . . . a central banking system. . . .

BURNETT. Despite the opposition of some individuals who lack the foresight so needed in these trying times, I feel that a centralized banking system like that will give the state a stability and assurance that nothing else could. And it will establish Texas' credit with other nations.

ALPHONSE. Yes . . . certainly . . . of course. Well, here we are! (*Surveying his work proudly.*) That will do it! This bit of paper written from the capitol of Texas will be of inestimable value to you men of the frontier. A simple note to my brother-in-law, the Minister of Finance.

BURNETT (*crossing to the Count and shaking his hand*). Well, Count, I want to thank you again personally for all you've done.

ALPHONSE. It is nothing! Here, Burnett, you may hear what I have written. It is but a question of a few weeks and the money is in the hands of Texas. (*A pistol shot is heard off stage. Rising.*) What was that?

[*Henriette screams, and Alphonse rushes to the window.*]

BURNETT. It was a pistol shot!

HENRIETTE. Oh, quelqu'un a été assassiné! J'en suis sûre!!

[*Abner disappears quickly across the gallery.*]

ALPHONSE. Who was that?

HENRIETTE. C'était Abner! (*Calling after him.*) Abner! Vous ferez mal! Abner!

BURNETT (*starting for the hall door*). I'll go see what it was.

[*Enter Marie and Mathilde much excited.*]

THE COUNT AND THE PIG

MARIE (*to Burnett*). Who is firing a gun in this yard? What's happening? (*Crossing to Alphonse.*) Alphonse, see about it at once! Oh, this place! Oh, this wild country!

MATHILDE. Alphonse! (*Seeing that Burnett is very near her.*) OHHHHH! Indians!

[*She faints. Burnett catches her just before she falls to the floor, and carries her to the sofa.*]

MARIE. Mathilde!

HENRIETTE (*calling out the window*). Abner! Oh!

MARIE. Henriette, get some water quick! (*Henriette doesn't move.*) VITE!

[*Henriette starts to obey but returns to the window, wringing her hands.*]

MATHILDE (*reviving*). Ohhh . . . What . . .

BURNETT. Just be calm. It was nothing but a shot.

[*Abner appears at the window, much excited.*]

ABNER. Somebody shot papa's pig!

MARIE. That pig again.

ABNER. Right there, behind the house, near your stables, somebody shot papa's pig! Shot him dead!

ALPHONSE. Come in here, young man, and explain yourself.

ABNER (*coming through the window*). That's all there is! He's dead. The biggest pig papa owned. He sure will be mad.

BURNETT (*crossing behind the sofa*). Why, that's serious business, killing a pig. Who did it?

ABNER. I don't know, but papa'll be mad enough to kill the fellow what did. Gosh, I don't want to be the one to tell him.

ALPHONSE. Where was the pig, did you say?

ABNER (*pointing off*). By the stable out there.

MARIE. You see, Alphonse, he was on our grounds again.

ALPHONSE. In this yard, was he? What was he doing here again? Answer me!

THE COUNT AND THE PIG

BURNETT. Did you know he was running loose, Abner?

ABNER. No, sir, I put him in again this morning.

BURNETT. We must find out who did it. A pig is a valuable animal.

[*Enter Beauchamp from the hall with the pistol in hand, defiant. He quietly closes the door after him. Everyone looks at him speechless for a moment.*]

BEAUCHAMP. I killed the pig.

BURNETT. You deliberately shot a pig belonging to the innkeeper?

ABNER. *The pig!* Papa's biggest pig!

BEAUCHAMP (*calmly*). I warned you and your father that the next time that pig trespassed here would be the last. It was!

ALPHONSE. Why do you take things into your own hands?

BEAUCHAMP (*replacing the pistol on the wall*). M'sieu, I had stood all the nonsense I was going to from that animal. I, a manservant, have had to take time from my duties to help the gardener replant what that beast uprooted. There comes a time when a man can stand no more such indignities. I took matters in my own hands. I stooped to the methods of this country and met violence with violence. I feel the episode is closed.

[*He starts to go.*]

BURNETT. I'm afraid the episode is not closed. You've done this boy (*Pointing to Abner.*) and his father a wrong. Pigs mean money in Texas.

ALPHONSE (*turning on him*). I suppose the corn in my stables is worth nothing? I paid money for that corn to feed my own animals, not that innkeeper's pig!

BURNETT. Well, I know, Count, but you can more easily replace a load of corn than a poor man can buy a pig.

ALPHONSE (*walking up and down*). Pig, pig! As Vice-President of Texas you ought to know that the land belonging to this Embassy is under the protection of the French Crown.

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BURNETT. Of course, Count, but I'm sure the innkeeper didn't mean to trouble you purposely . . .

ALPHONSE (*crossing left*). That had nothing to do with it. Beauchamp was right. I would have done the same thing.

BURNETT. Abner, I think you'd better go home and tell your father what's happened.

HENRIETTE. Non, non!

ABNER. Well, I . . . I don't think I better . . .

MARIE. Why not? You certainly can't stay here!

ABNER (*very scared*). I don't dare tell papa. He'll mighty near kill me.

ALPHONSE. Beauchamp! Go to the inn and have that Bullock person remove his pig from our premises immediately!

ABNER (*shaking his head forebodingly*). Uh, oh!

ALPHONSE (*at left*). Did you hear what I said, Beauchamp? Tell him to remove that dead animal at once! We can't have it lying in the yard like this.

BEAUCHAMP. Now, M'sieu?

ALPHONSE. Yes, *now*!

BEAUCHAMP. Yes, M'sieu.

[*He reaches for the pistol.*]

ALPHONSE. Without the pistol.

BEAUCHAMP. Without the pistol?

ALPHONSE. Of course.

BURNETT. I think it would be wiser.

[*Beauchamp shrugs his shoulders and goes reluctantly.*]

ALPHONSE (*turning to Burnett*). The people of Europe would be surprised to know, M'sieu, that a country that wished to take its place among the nations of the world can call itself civilized when there is no respect for the rights of others.

BURNETT. You shouldn't make so much of it, Count. After all . . .

ABNER (*looking out the window after Beauchamp*). He ought not to have gone.

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MARIE. Henriette! Come here. (*Henriette goes to her at the sofa.*) What's that in your hand?

HENRIETTE (*putting her hand behind her*). Rien. Rien du tout.

MARIE (*going around to her behind the sofa*). Let me see it!

BURNETT. Well, Count . . . well, if things are settled about the loan and all, I expect I'd better go along. Could I . . . er . . . post that letter for you?

MARIE. Henriette!

ALPHONSE. Oh, the letter! With all this interruption, I haven't signed it. Let's see, where is it? Somewhere on the desk here. Oh yes, here it is.

[*Sits down to read it through again, trying to concentrate.*]

MARIE. Give it to me at once. If you don't want me to see it, it's something you shouldn't have.

MATHILDE. Not another scene, oh, please.

MARIE. Then I'll take it from you.

[*She does.*]

HENRIETTE. Non, non! Veuillez me le rendre. Ce n'est rien.

MARIE. Stop! (*She reads the note.*) "L'amour, l'amour, je chante toujours, de vous — et Abner! J'écrirai toujours mes chansons pour vous! Mon coeur est à vous! Henriette!"

MATHILDE (*going to Marie and reading over her shoulder*). Oh, look! "You are the prettiest girl I ever knew, and the nicest. From Texas do not go away, because I like you better and better every day!"

MARIE. I don't believe it. Henriette, did you write this?

MATHILDE (*to Abner*). And *you*!

MARIE. This is worse than I thought.

HENRIETTE. Et je l'ai fait exprès. Il est tres gentil!

MARIE. This settles it! I've done everything I can, Mathilde. Alphonse will do nothing about it, so I've decided! Henriette shall be sent to the convent at New

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Orleans. (*Walking away, right.*) There she will behave herself.

[*She crushes the note in her hand and throws it away.*]

HENRIETTE. Non! Je n'y irai pas.

MATHILDE. You are disturbing M'sieu Burnett and Alphonse.

MARIE. Oh, yes, you will go! And right away.

HENRIETTE. Non!

ABNER (*at the window*). Hey, look! I knew it! He's killing him!

BURNETT (*going to the window also*). What do you mean? Who?

ABNER. Papa! He's beating that man you sent to the inn. Look!

ALPHONSE (*jumping up and rushing to the window*).

Where? Where? (*Starting for the door.*) I'll show that innkeeper he can't lay hands on my servant.

MATHILDE. Save him, Alphonse!

ABNER. It's too late now.

[*Exit Alphonse, followed by Burnett.*]

MARIE. Alphonse!

[*She and Mathilde go out onto the porch, and are seen watching agitatedly, outside the windows, throughout the next scene. There is a moment of embarrassed silence. Abner is looking out the window. Henriette has hidden her face in her hands, and turned away. Finally she glances at Abner, goes over and retrieves the crumpled note Marie threw to the floor, and smoothes it out.*]

ABNER (*excited*). Papa sees him coming!

HENRIETTE (*sobbing*). Ohhhh! Oh!

[*She collapses on the sofa.*]

ABNER (*turning*). What's, what's the matter?

HENRIETTE. Ce matin tout allait si bien at maintenant tout va mal! Avez vous entendu ce qu'a dit Marie? Elle me renvoie au couvent et je serai prisonnière et je ne vous reverrai jamais!

ABNER. Huh? What?

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HENRIETTE (*still crying*). Mais voyons, je ne veux pas aller à la Nouvelle Orleans; je veux rester ici. Tout le monde me traitent si mal! Moi, qui n'ai jamais rien fait.

ABNER. Say, don't cry. Your brother ain't going to be hurt, unless papa gets awful mad.

HENRIETTE. Je ne me soucie pas d'Alphonse; il peut se garder bien. Mais il sera en rapport avec Marie, j'en suis sûr. Et on me renverra . . .

[*She still sobs.*]

ABNER. Well, look now, I wish you wouldn't cry. (*He comes down by the couch.*) And I don't guess I understand what you're saying.

HENRIETTE. Mais voyons donc! Marie, my sister, elle dit qu'elle me renverra . . . to New Orleans. Me, go to New Orleans! Comprenez-vous?

ABNER. You're going away?

HENRIETTE. Je serai installée, me, in . . . le couvent, couvent.

[*She makes a sign of praying.*]

ABNER. Church?

HENRIETTE. Oui. Non. Couvent, couvent!

ABNER. Oh, you mean a convent! Why that's awful. You'll have to go to school all day and they won't let you out.

HENRIETTE. There is not . . . no one . . . to save me!

ABNER (*sitting down beside her*). I know how you feel, but I wish I *was* going away. I'm scared to go home now. Papa will give me an awful beating for causing all this trouble! Oh, gee, what am I going to do?

HENRIETTE. Mon pauvre Abner! We, you and me, we are together in a sad place.

ABNER. Yeah, I've got to do something desperate. You have, too!

HENRIETTE. Vous êtes le seul qui soit gentil avec moi. You are so . . . bon . . . so kind to me.

ABNER (*suddenly*). Say, Henry-ette! Do you like me? Well, I mean a lot, well . . .

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HENRIETTE. Que je vous aime? Ah, j'ai pour vous une affection si . . . me . . . I told you there.

[*Pointing to the note.*]

ABNER. Well, I cain't read it, but I guessed you did.

HENRIETTE. Oui.

ABNER. You know what, Henry-ette? I'm going away, too.

HENRIETTE. Where are you . . . where will you . . . go?

ABNER. Oh, I don't know. I might just git out to the frontier, where the Indians are. There are some friendly tribes, you know.

HENRIETTE. Les Indiens!

ABNER. But that might be pretty far. Say! You know what? My uncle, he lives in Louisiana. I could go there; he'd let me stay with him. I could earn my own way taking care of his . . . well, I could do something. (*Suddenly.*) Say, Henry-ette! You know, you and I could go away together . . . well, that is, if you like me enough. Would you?

HENRIETTE. C'est ça que j'allais dire. Could we . . . do you . . . like me that much?

ABNER. Sure, you're the nicest girl I ever saw, and the prettiest — like I wrote you. Maybe we could get married!

HENRIETTE. Oh, yes, marry . . . oui!

ABNER. Yeah. Say, you reckon we can? I mean (*Rising.*) maybe we'd better go *now*.

HENRIETTE. Oh, but I shall have to . . . pack a valise . . . and get my coat.

ABNER. I'm going like this. I'm afraid to go home, I might git caught.

HENRIETTE. Wait here . . . for me!

ABNER (*going to the window at the right*). Oh, there ain't no time! Look, they're coming back. We cain't go now.

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HENRIETTE (*following him to the window*). Ohhhh! Abner! We go . . . this evening. I will meet you.

ABNER. All right, I'll be out back, waiting for you.

HENRIETTE. Abner, voudriez-vous m'embrasser?

[*She turns her cheek for him to kiss.*]

ABNER (*blushing, kisses her*). There!

HENRIETTE. Oh, Abner . . .

[*There is a commotion on the porch. Enter Alphonse, followed by Marie, Mathilde, Burnett, and Beauchamp, who sits exhausted and disheveled in the chair at the desk.*]

ALPHONSE. Never! Never have I been so insulted!

BURNETT. Now, Count, everything will be fixed up. I'll see to it.

ALPHONSE. No man can do that to a Saligny (*Pointing to the portrait.*) and live!

BURNETT. But you can see, Count, that justice demands . . .

ALPHONSE. Justice? Justice! Ha! What do you know of justice? There's only one thing to do!

MATHILDE (*who has been petting and comforting Beauchamp*). But what, Alphonse?

ALPHONSE. We will return to France!

[*Beauchamp rises, as though ready at a moment's notice.*]

HENRIETTE. Non!

MATHILDE. But the dinner party!

ALPHONSE (*crossing to the left*). I'll not stay in a country where the honor of France and of the Salignys can be insulted by such a man, and in the streets!

BURNETT. I've apologized for him, Count, and as a member of the government . . .

ALPHONSE (*turning to him*). You! If the Vice-President of a nation can do nothing, there is no government!

BURNETT. Now, we can't let this thing be so important, just when France is about to advance to Texas the loan . . .

THE COUNT AND THE PIG

ALPHONSE. Loan? Loan! To Texas? No!

[He gets the letter he has written from the desk and tears it up.]

BURNETT. Say!

ALPHONSE *(to Burnett.)* No French francs shall be had while I live, and my brother-in-law is Minister of Finance!

BURNETT. But Count . . .

ALPHONSE. Sisters, prepare to leave immediately.

HENRIETTE. Oh, non! je resterai ici.

MARIE. Come, Henriette! Mathilde! This is the happiest day of my life!

[Exit Marie and Mathilde.]

BEAUCHAMP *(to Abner.)* Oh, you, sir! Your father mentioned something about a chicken. He wants to see you.

[Exit Beauchamp.]

ABNER *(who has been in the corner.)* Now I'll get it! Uh, oh!

HENRIETTE. Oh, Abner, il faut agir!

BURNETT. Count, I'm sure there is something we can do. What shall I tell the President?

ALPHONSE. Tell him the truth! And when I arrive in Paris, the Texas government will hear from me. Never fear, oh, no!

HENRIETTE. Maintenant! Abner, peut-être . . . go now . . . you and I!

ABNER. We cain't. We could never get away now.

[Enter Marie with a small bag, coat and hat.]

MARIE *(crossing immediately to Henriette.)* Henriette! What are you doing?

HENRIETTE. Je n'irai jamais!

MARIE *(jerking her away.)* Come away from that person. Here!

[She forces her into her coat, and puts her hat on her head.]

ALPHONSE *(to Marie.)* Where is my coat?

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MATHILDE (*entering*). Has Henriette got her things on?

[*Beauchamp enters right after her.*]

BEAUCHAMP. The man has brought the carriage to the front, M'sieu.

[*Beauchamp is wearing his coat and carrying his hat.*]

ALPHONSE. What's this, Beauchamp? Why do you have your hat and coat?

BEAUCHAMP. Oh, I've been waiting for this many months, M'sieu. I am ready.

ALPHONSE. But no! You will come on after, Beauchamp. All our things must be packed and sent on to Paris. Who but you?

BEAUCHAMP. But M'sieu . . .

ALPHONSE. You will send our trunks directly to the steamer at Galveston. The household effects you will send as soon as possible.

BEAUCHAMP. I will be left here alone in Texas? With no one . . .

ALPHONSE. Enough, Beauchamp. We must be off at once. The coach will be leaving. Come, sisters!

[*Starting to the door.*]

BURNETT. But Count, wait!

ALPHONSE (*ignoring him*). Come!

HENRIETTE. Oh, Abner!

MARIE (*holding her by the hand*). Henriette, stop this foolishness!

HENRIETTE. Mais voyons donc, Abner, ils m'emportent. Je t'aimerai toujours! Je vous ecrirai. . . . Un beau jour peut-être . . .

[*She sobs.*]

ABNER. Good-bye, Henry-ette!

HENRIETTE (*pulling back*). Beauchamp! Gardez-le! (*Pointing to Abner. Then, to Abner.*) Gardez Beauchamp!

[*Marie gives her a firm jerk.*]

ALPHONSE. Come, come, we shall miss the coach!

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MARIE. Ah, Paris!

ALPHONSE. To Paris!

[They file out quickly, Marie pulling Henriette last, as she still calls to Abner. Abner runs to the window for a last glimpse and waves. Beauchamp gets the pistol off the wall. Burnett, exhausted, sinks in the nearest chair, his head in his hands.]

Curtain

2.
SHOOTING STAR

By
JACK W. LEWIS

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CAST

RUSSELL DAY, *owner of the SHOOTING STAR.*

RITA, *his wife.*

MRS. WILSON, *a neighbor.*

PETE, *an old prospector.*

BILLY, *Russell's partner.*

SCENE. The interior of a cabin in a deserted mining village in Colorado.

TIME. About dusk of a day in early autumn.

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In Russell Day's cabin, the only light comes through a small window in the back wall to the left, through which the outlines of the mountains, already in the shadow of a Colorado twilight, are seen. The entrance door is on the left. On the right is a smaller door, leading to a second room which serves as the kitchen. A heating stove and wood-box are at center back. To the right of these, there is a shelf containing an oil lamp, several magazines, and sundry bric-a-brac. Below the shelf, hang several garments on hooks. Against the right wall is a double-decked bunk of roughly painted boards. A rickety rocking chair and a disreputable kitchen chair are on either side of the stove, forward a little. The usual soapbox is against the left wall in front of the door. The only touches of color are the window curtains of faded green voile and the patchwork comfort on the lower bunk, evidently the attempts of a woman to make the cabin cheerful. The wallpaper, however, blights this endeavor. It may have looked presentable when the cabin was built years ago during the mining boom, but now it is a faded, dirty brown color, streaked here and there by the melted snow which has seeped through the walls from time to time.

When the curtain rises, Rita Day is seen looking out the window. She is but dimly discernible in the half-light. If we could see her plainly we should discover that she is about twenty-five years old, pretty, and although simply dressed, possessed of considerable charm, which is enhanced rather than lessened by her look of wistfulness, which at times is almost sadness.

There is a knock at the door. Rita calls, without turning from the window.

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RITA. Who is there?

[The door opens and Mrs. Wilson enters. She is a tall, raw-boned woman of fifty, bearing the traces of a life of labor, and dressed in a cheap, faded print dress.]

MRS. WILSON. Just me, Mrs. Day. I dropped in to return your magazines and say I surely . . .

RITA (*coming forward*). Mrs. Wilson! You must excuse me for not coming to the door. I thought it was Billy.

MRS. WILSON. Billy? Oh, that young fellow who's been helping your husband work the mine.

RITA. Yes. Do sit down, and I'll light the lamps. (*Mrs. Wilson seats herself in the rocking chair while Rita lights the lamp on the shelf. The rudeness of the cabin is accentuated by the light.*) Billy has been running in and out all day, fetching things from the back room and acting mysterious. He won't say a word, just looks wise and important.

MRS. WILSON. Now if that was Ed Wilson, I'd say he'd been drinking. He always looks important when he gets a little liquor in him. That's how I find him out.

RITA (*laughing*). I don't think that is it. Russ and Billy have probably dug up another rock down at the Shooting Star that they think is aur-aur- what is the funny word?

MRS. WILSON. Auriferous. I've heard that word from Ed for twenty-five years, but all I've seen of it is enough to buy beans and flour for the two of us, and sometimes not enough of those.

RITA (*musingly*). Twenty-five years! That's an awfully long time, isn't it? It makes my six years look small.

MRS. WILSON. That's just the half of it. God willing, I'm good for twenty-five more of the same thing, unless Ed strikes it rich, or lays down and dies. It'd be just like him to do that.

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RITA. Don't you ever feel that you can't go on like that, working and never getting anywhere?

MRS. WILSON. I used to sometimes, but Ed and me used to move around quite a bit. I didn't have time to get tired of one place. He'd make a little strike somewhere and we'd get enough money to buy a few things, and when that was gone we'd start all over again. The worst times was when we'd stake everything on some claim that didn't produce enough gold to buy what we ate. I'd try to get him to give up prospecting then, and we'd always end with a big fuss. I'd be all ready to leave him, and he'd go and get drunk, and I'd have to stay to take care of him. He's such a baby.

RITA. I have tried to persuade Russ to abandon this kind of life. He is sincere when he promises, after every try, to give it up. But there is always a sure thing just a little farther on, and so it goes. He loves it.

MRS. WILSON. They all do.

RITA. Russ has promised to quit after working the Shooting Star. He is sure it's a good thing and will make our fortune. That is why he swears it is his last venture.

MRS. WILSON. Ed always said there was gold in that mine of yours.

RITA. I hope so, but I don't dare wish real hard any more. There have been so many disappointments. We have been here eleven months now. Sometimes I get so lonely and restless I don't know what to do.

MRS. WILSON (*gently*). Yes, I know.

RITA. I couldn't stand it at all if it weren't for the mountains. They are so clean, and fresh, and comforting. Everything else is dead and squalid. When we first came here I thought it was such fun to ramble around in the old deserted buildings, to imagine I was living in the glamorous Colorado of the past. The old theatre, the abandoned saloons, so silent and musty; it was like wandering through a city of the dead. Whenever I saw any-

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one in the street I was startled. I resented even the dozen or so people who lived here. But now I see the place for what it is, a skeleton, the body devoured by worms, the worms of age, of desertion; haunted by the ghosts of what it used to be, ghosts that taunt and mock us for trying to get out of the earth what they have already taken. (*Sobs.*) It's . . . it's horrible.

MRS. WILSON. You mustn't let yourself feel like that. You make it worse.

RITA. If only I could get away! Sometimes I think that if I remain longer I shall begin to hate the mountains, too, and they are all that keep me from going to pieces.

MRS. WILSON. You have your husband, dear. Doesn't . . .

RITA. Can't you see? If that happened, I should hate him, too. I couldn't help it. It isn't a great step from detesting one's surroundings to despising the people around one. And I love Russ too much to see that happen. It would kill him.

MRS. WILSON. Poor darling! You are all upset. Why don't you take a trip to the city? Perhaps you and I could go together.

RITA. That wouldn't help. It would only make the contrast worse when I returned. I want to get away for good, to live among people, to have a real home, and children; to quit this eternal gambling with nature, this hoping, hoping, hoping, hoping, and always being disillusioned.

MRS. WILSON (*cheerfully*). Now, you stop! Things aren't near as bad as you make out. Forget it for a while. I tell you that mine is liable to make you rich yet.

RITA (*smiling weakly*). Russ says it will, but . . .

MRS. WILSON. No "buts."

RITA (*squeezing her hand*). It does help to talk to you, Mrs. Wilson. I have to unload my woes on someone.

MRS. WILSON. Of course. And seeing as you and I are the only women in this community, we just naturally

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have to cry on each other. (*She picks up a nearly finished print dress from the chair.*) Now, what's this?

RITA. I forgot all about showing you. It's the new dress I am making.

MRS. WILSON. Lovely!

RITA. It's for nice. I shall wear it when the Wilsons and the Days play cards, or when I carry Russ's lunch across Fifth Avenue to the mine. It cost ninety-seven cents, including the thread.

MRS. WILSON. Is that all?

RITA. That's a lot right now. Russ saved it out of the last money we got. Everything we make goes into that mine. Do you know this is the first dress I have had for nine months? My only other one (*Pointing to the one she is wearing.*) is coming to pieces.

MRS. WILSON. You have me beat. If Ed ever gets anything else from his diggings I'm going to blow myself. Well, I guess I'll have to run along home before the beans burn.

[*She rises.*]

RITA. We are varying our menu tonight. It is going to be corn, out of a can.

MRS. WILSON. The only corn I see around our house comes in a bottle. Well, I suppose Ed's home now, cussing all over the place because dinner ain't ready.

RITA. Russ is late tonight. He should be here by this time.

MRS. WILSON (*leaving*). By the way, I expect you'll be panhandled for a meal tonight. Old Pete's in town again, hungry and broke. I fed him lunch. Same old tale; still looking for gold in "them thar mountains."

RITA. Poor old fellow. The last time he was here he told us he was eighty. He wants Russ to grubstake him every time he comes around. Of course we're never able to.

MRS. WILSON. When the gold fever gets them, it's good-bye. I have an example in my own home. Now, you

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remember what I told you about feeling blue. It'll only make your husband feel bad and you feel worse.

[*Mrs. Wilson leaves. Rita picks up the dress and sits down. Mrs. Wilson's voice is heard saying "Good evening" to someone outside, and there is a masculine voice in answer. The door opens and Russell Day enters. Rita rises. Russell is young, possibly thirty, fairly good-looking, and dressed in working clothes: worn hiking pants, boots, woolen shirt, etc. He is obviously excited.*

RUSS (~~throwing his arms around Rita, who still holds the dress in one hand~~). Rita! It's happened! We've found . . .

RITA (*calming him*). Yes, dear. I know. You and Billy have dug up another ossirifarous — I don't think that's the right word — rock, and . . . and . . . we are going to be millionaires, and . . .

RUSS (*with disappointment*). Billy did tell you, and he promised . . .

RITA. Please don't be so excited. Billy didn't say a word. Don't you think I can read your expressions? You're wearing the "rich and famous" one now.

RUSS. Stop joking, Rita. This is important. We've run on to a vein in the Shooting Star. You know what a vein is, don't you?

RITA. Of course, dear. It's something that carries blood to the heart, isn't it? But you haven't heard the really important news. We are going to have corn for supper, and *biscuits*. You sit down and rest and I'll have things ready in a minute.

[*She starts to leave.*

RUSS (*sharply*). Rita! (*She comes back.*) I can't understand why you're acting this way. It isn't like you. I rushed home to tell you the big news about a strike at the Shooting Star and you . . .

RITA. I didn't mean to hurt you, Russ. Now, sit down. (*She pushes him into the chair and perches on the arm.*) Russ, dear, I just can't stand to be disappointed again.

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It's so hard to believe one's dreams have come true, and then, after planning and hoping, to find that what you thought was reality turned out to be only an illusion after all. That's why I had to try to joke, to keep myself from believing what I want to believe and don't dare. So I would rather not hear about it this time.

RUSS. But you don't understand! This is different. I tell you . . . (*At a restraining gesture from Rita.*) Oh, I know, Rita, it has been damned tough for you, and I've made it worse. I've been the bad boy who rang the alarm when there wasn't any fire, and when there really is one the house burns down.

RITA (*patting his head*). That's something of the idea; but isn't your metaphor a bit mixed? And you aren't a bad boy at all. And you do believe your own alarms.

RUSS. Why haven't you said something before? You have stuck with me, and worked, and helped, and . . .

RITA. Silly boy! Of course I have. I happen to love you, and believe in you, except when you think you have found gold . . .

RUSS. Damn it! I *have* found . . .

RITA. Let's talk about something else. Oh! My new dress! (*She exhibits it.*) The ninety-seven cent one, including the thread. Do you like it?

RUSS. I love it. I like anything you make. But . . .

RITA (*teasingly*). Biscuits? You don't seem to appreciate the fact that there's a pan full of them in the next room, waiting to be baked.

RUSS (*rises from the chair and speaks with determination*). Rita, you are going to listen to me! I admit that there have been false alarms, but what I have to say now will make up for everything. Billy and I struck a vein at the mine today, a real, honest-to-God vein. It's a sure thing. There might be fifty thousand in it; there might be two million.

RITA (*incredulously*). Russ! It can't be true. Please, please don't get me to hoping this time.

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Russ (*takes the dress from her*). Do you see this? It's a symbol of our life for the last six years; ninety-seven cents and it lasts a year. Well, that is over with now. (*Russ tears the dress up the side and flings it on the floor in the direction of the bunk.*) We're rich now, I tell you, *rich!*

RITA (*making a little impulsive movement toward the dress*). Oh, it is true; it has to be! You never would have done that if it weren't! (*Sobs.*) I, I can't believe it yet. Russ, tell me about it; make me believe!

Russ (*pulling her with him into the rocker*). That isn't hard. We came across a fault formation; you know, one of those veins that begins suddenly and runs along for God knows how long. It's going to develop into something tremendous. We've already uncovered about two hundred dollars' worth of gold.

RITA. It sounds so wonderful.

Russ. It is! Billy is still down there trying to estimate how far the vein runs. He has a lot of technical theories he wants to try out. That kid works hard; he's earned his fifteen per cent all right.

RITA. There isn't any chance that something could go wrong, is there?

Russ (*laughing*). You are hard to convince.
[*Kisses her.*]

RITA. I know, but . . . Oh, Russ! It frightens me. We have been sure before, and . . .

Russ (*positively*). Never like this. Why, Rita, ours is one of the richest finds that's ever been made around here.

RITA. I guess I have been foolish, dear. Isn't it strange, having this happen so suddenly? I suppose it always does, though. It is like getting an unexpected parole after being in prison for years and years.

Russ. Sweet girl! From now on the world is yours to play with, a sort of reward for faithfulness. I guess I have been rather selfish. You know, I've enjoyed the whole game.

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RITA. It hasn't been bad all of the time for me, but this makes me feel so, so free. Russ, I'm so glad this happened before I began to hate the mountains.

RUSS (*puzzled*). Hate the mountains?

RITA (*softly*). Something you can't understand, dear. It would have had such dreadful consequences. And I'm so happy it didn't happen; it can't happen, now. (*There is the muffled sound of an explosion in the distance.*) Oh! What was that?

RUSS. It sounded like a blast. Billy, I expect. Couldn't wait until morning to go on with the work. (*Wistfully.*) I'd like to be down there, too.

RITA (*firmly*). Well, you aren't, so that settles it. Now you forget it. From now on it's my world; you said so.

RUSS. I meant it. Speak on, tyrantess.

RITA. In the first place, you're going to sell out.

RUSS. Sell out? But . . .

RITA (*firmly*). Sell out! You can't work the mine yourself. We're going to devote ourselves to living.

RUSS (*resignedly*). I suppose so. I had wanted to stay here a while longer. Colorado has been good to us, Rita.

RITA (*a bit sadly*). I know.

RUSS. I met you here, you know. Do you remember . . .

RITA (*laughing*). How could I forget? You looked so funny the first time I saw you.

RUSS. I'd just graduated. Mining engineer! It sounded important, didn't it?

RITA. Your head was just bursting with knowledge, right out of a geology book. And your borrowed tuxedo didn't fit; I think the collar was too large.

RUSS. And how I danced!

RITA. And talked! I think you weakened my resistance and overpowered me with words. I didn't know the meaning of any of them.

RUSS. Neither did I.

RITA. Remember our schemes? We were going to spend

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a year digging around in the mountains and if we didn't have any luck you were going to be something respectable, like a mine superintendent, or consulting engineer for the Oppenheim interests. But first of all we were going to have our adventure.

RUSS. Well, we've had it. And it's been fun, too, hasn't it?

RITA. Sometimes. (*Smiling.*) The food hasn't. Life has been just one damned plate of beans after another.

RUSS. I'd look at you and never know I was eating them.

RITA. It will be more fun after we get away and can look back on it. We can think about the little cabin we had in an abandoned mining town in the Colorado mountains, and tell our grandchildren . . . we can afford grandchildren now, can't we, Russ dear?

RUSS. I . . . I suppose so. Of course, first of all we'll have to . . .

RITA (*teasingly*). How stupid of me. I completely forgot. Well, we can have those too, can't we?

RUSS. You bet we can!

RITA (*throwing her arms around him*). I'm so happy!

[*There is a knock at the door. Rita gets up hurriedly. Old Pete peers in, then opens the door wider and enters. He is eighty, and looks it: short white beard, wrinkled face, and stooped shoulders, but active, for all that. He bears the stamp of the "old prospector" upon him. His clothes are as ancient as himself. At present he is a trifle tipsy, enough at least to be garrulous.*

PETE. Howdy, folks! Gittin' sorta chilly these evenin's, ain't it?

RUSS. Hello, Pete! Come on over to the fire and get warm. Sorry I haven't anything to heat your insides up.

PETE. Well now, that's all right. Me and Ed Wilson had a couple just now. It ain't like the old days, though; this irrigated corn ain't got no more kick than

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a mule's carcass. (*Wistfully.*) All a feller gits outa this stuff is an appetite.

RIITA (*taking the hint*). You'll stay to supper, won't you? I'm getting ready to put some biscuits into the oven right now.

RUSS. Sure, you will.

PETE. I don't mind if I do. (*Chucks Rita under the chin.*) I reckon it's a good thing for your husband I didn't see you first. I been huntin' all my life fer a gal that was good lookin' and could cook. They're scarce animals.

RIITA. Why, Pete! Are you trying to make love to me? And at your age, too!

PETE (*winking at her*). Well, I still got young ideas.

[*Rita goes out to right; Pete sits down in the kitchen chair, which he draws up nearer the stove.*]

RUSS. Where have you been the last few months? We were beginning to think you got lost, or eaten up by a mountain lion.

PETE (*chuckling*). Lost! I been trampin' up and down this country for near sixty years. And as fer the mountain lions, I've made friends with all the critters from here to Cripple Creek, now that they've found out I'm too old to make a good meal for 'em.

RUSS. Have any luck this trip?

PETE (*unexpectedly*). Yes, I did, but I ran short of grub and had to beat it back. I've got somethin' up there, Russ, that looks like pay dirt. That's what I wanted to see you about.

RUSS. Grubstake?

PETE. Well, not exactly. I'm gittin' old, Russ; can't work like I used to. If I had somebody to help me do the diggin' and put up a little money — it wouldn't take much — I'd give him half-interest. It's better'n scratchin' around in that old tunnel of yours.

RUSS. I'm afraid not, Pete. I've run across something

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at the Shooting Star that promises to be a big thing.

PETE. Now, don't you put too much faith in that second-hand mine. I ain't seen one yet that amounted to anything. You'd better take me up.

RUSS. It sounds good, Pete, but . . . well, as a matter of fact, Billy, the kid who's been helping me, and I uncovered a vein at the Shooting Star today. Fault formation. It's a real strike.

PETE (*scratching his head*). Fault formation, eh? I dunno . . .

[*There is a noise from the kitchen. Rita puts her head through the door and speaks to Russ.*]

RITA. The first thing we're going to buy with our money is a house with an honest-to-God stove in it. This blamed thing just finished falling to pieces again.

RUSS. Need any help, honey?

RITA (*disappearing*). No, thanks. It's beyond help. I only wanted to register a complaint.

PETE. You shouldn't be puttin' ideas about havin' lots of money into the head of that pretty wife of yours. It ain't right. After all, you ain't sure you've got it yet.

RUSS. You old joy-killer; if you could see that vein . . .

PETE. Listen, Russ; I ain't jealous because you've got something. I like to see the other feller strike it rich. But there's a lot of things you don't figger on kin happen.

[*Rita reënters.*]

RITA. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes, if the stove holds together.

PETE. If I'm goin' to stay, I reckon I'd better tie that burro up before he eats some of the boards off your shack. Russ, you'd better reconsider that proposition.

[*Pete goes out.*]

RITA. What does Pete want?

RUSS (*laughing*). He's trying to persuade me to give up the Shooting Star and help him work his claim. The old fool!

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RITA. Oh, Russ! I feel sorry for him. He's so pathetic. Now that we have money, can't we do something for him?

RUSS. About the best thing we can do is to grubstake him. If he's determined to die in the mountains, we'll see to it that he doesn't starve.

RITA. Let's! I'll bet he hasn't had a decent meal for months. I feel so queer talking to him, Russ. Sometimes he reminds me of you.

RUSS. Of me?

RITA. Yes, I don't know why. (*Thinking.*) Yes I do, too! Russ! He's what you . . . we . . . might have been. (*Shudders.*) It makes me afraid . . .

RUSS. You mustn't think about that now, dear. Smile for me. Happy?

RITA. So happy it hurts! I love you, Russ.

RUSS. I love to hear you say that.

[*Pete reënters.*]

RITA. Well, I must look at the biscuits. I wonder if Billy will come in time to eat?

PETE. I seen somebody with a light comin' across town when I was out there. He was headin' this way.

RUSS. That was Billy, all right.

[*Rita goes out.*]

PETE. Well, have you changed your mind?

RUSS. No, and I'm not likely to. I'll tell you what I will do, though . . .

PETE. Russ, you're crazy to count on that mine of yours. You think you've made a strike, huh? Well, let me tell you . . .

RUSS (*a bit angrily*). Good God, Pete, what have you against the Shooting Star?

PETE (*leaning forward*). If you want to know somethin' about that mine . . .

RUSS (*sharply*). What's the matter with it?

PETE (*positively*). It's no good.

[*Rita's head appears from the kitchen.*]

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RITA. Russ! Do you think we could have three children?

I shouldn't mind, really. Two boys and a girl.

RUSS. Of course, dear; anything you say.

[Rita's head disappears. She hums a tune.]

RUSS *(to Pete, as if humoring him)*. Go on; I'm interested in hearing what's wrong with my mine.

PETE. Well, the original name of that mine wasn't the Shooting Star at all; it was the Miranda.

RUSS. What the hell has that to do with it?

PETE. Plenty. The first feller that owned that mine had two rich lookin' veins come to a dead end on him almost before they's started. That was fifty years ago. Well, he renamed it the Shootin' Star and sold it to the first sucker that came along.

RUSS. Shooting Star!

PETE. Yeah! That's what it was. A nice blaze-up and lots of pretty yellow for a minute, and then it goes out. All you got left is a chunk of burned up rock and a hole in the ground. It's all the same, a shootin' star or a bum mine.

RUSS. But I don't see . . .

PETE. That ain't all. The second feller had the same experience. He found one vein. It popped out. When he heard about the other two he chucked it up in a hurry. That's the last I ever heard of that hole until you started diggin'. You see what's liable to happen to you? That mine's bad luck.

RUSS. But that's mere superstition. There's no reason why . . .

PETE *(snorting)*. Mere superstition, hell! It was a perfect example of off-lapping. You've seen it lots of times, I reckon. The rest of them three veins is liable to have been shifted anywhere in this whole damned region when the mountains got to movin' around about a million years ago. And what happened to three of 'em is pretty sure to happen to the fourth. They're in the same mine, ain't they; the same formation?

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RUSS (*a trifle worried*). It is queer, but . . . listen here, Pete; I'm willing to stake anything . . .

[*Rita again bobs through the doorway.*]

RITA. I'm sorry, dear, but I've changed my mind. It's to be two girls and a boy. Two boys would always be fighting. Oh, I'm sorry if I interrupted.

[*She again disappears.*]

RUSS. What did you say, Rita? (*But she has gone.*) But Pete . . . Oh hell, you're probably making the whole story up just to string me.

PETE (*protestingly*). No, I ain't, Russ. I don't want to discourage nobody, but them's my opinions.

RUSS (*lightly*). We'll see. (*Billy pushes open the door and walks in. He is about twenty, and very dirty. It is evident that he has been working at some difficult job. He enters dejectedly.*) Here's Billy now. Hello, kid! What's the matter; been overworking yourself, haven't you? Sit down. (*Billy sits on the soapbox.*) You should have been here. Old Pete's been telling me that the Shooting Star . . .

BILLY (*suddenly*). Russ, that vein is a fluke.

RUSS (*incredulously*). A fluke! You mean . . .

BILLY (*nods*). It peters out a few feet from where we had dug when you left.

[*Pete wags his head, as if to say "I told you so."* Rita opens the door and comes in from the kitchen.

RITA. Supper's ready.

[*They pay no attention to her. She stands by the bunk, listening.*]

PETE. Just what I figgered.

RUSS. My God, Billy! You must be crazy. How . . .

BILLY. I'm afraid it's true, Russ. There's not a trace of gold in the last third of the rock my blast tore off. The vein comes to a dead end.

PETE. Off-laps, eh?

BILLY (*nodding*). It's too damned bad, Russ, but I guess we'll have to take it.

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[*Rita leans weakly against the post of the bunk.*

RUSS (*wildly*). Oh, God! I don't believe it. It can't have happened! I'm going down there.

[*He rushes frantically toward the door.*

RITA (*coming forward and placing her hand on Russ's arm. She speaks calmly*). Russ, dear! Please don't . . .

RUSS (*staring at her*). Rita! You heard? Oh, Rita! I'm sorry. I didn't know; I didn't think anything like this could . . . Rita! You hate me now, don't you?

RITA (*tenderly*). Of course not, dear. Sit down. You'll make yourself sick if you go on like this.

RUSS. I was so sure. It was impossible for . . . (*Again becoming incoherent.*) It can't have happened, I tell you; it can't! (*She strokes his hand.*) Rita! Don't you see what it means; it means we're not to be rich . . . all your plans . . .

RITA (*trying to be brave*). I . . . I don't mind, Russ. Not for myself. I wanted you to be happy. It . . . doesn't matter, dear. (*Trying hard to become practical.*) Let's be sensible about it; it was just another dream, and now we're awake. Let's rub the sleep from our eyes and . . . and see things as they really are.

RUSS. You're wonderful.

PETE. What are you going to do now? You can't just sit around and moan because one diggin's ain't no good.

RUSS (*clutching at a last straw*). There's a chance that the vein picks up again somewhere.

[*Pete snorts.*

BILLY. Somewhere. Not where we can get to it, though. According to the way the formation runs, the rest of our vein is somewhere in the direction of the old Katy. It probably is the Katy vein.

PETE. They took a million out of that hole in the old days. You fellers are fools diggin' around in these worked-out mines. I could make both of you rich if you'd come with me. I know where there's real gold.

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RUSS. I wonder . . .

RITA (*quickly*). Let's not talk about mines any more.

Russ, we're going to get away from here. We can't go on like this forever. (*To Billy.*) How much do you think that vein produced?

BILLY. Five hundred, possibly six.

RITA. Now, you listen to me. We're going to give Billy his money, and with what's left we're going away somewhere. I don't care where, just so I don't ever see another mine or hear the word "gold" again. You can get a job; I can work . . . anything . . . anything except this kind of life. I can't stand it, Russ, I . . .

[*She turns away quickly.*]

RUSS. It's hard to quit . . . a failure. But . . .

PETE. Good God! You're plannin' to take that money and get away, to starve to death maybe in the city, when you could make yourself rich with it? You'd be kickin' yourself all over the place later if you did that.

BILLY. Luck is bound to change sometime. It might be the making of us, Russ.

RUSS (*weakening*). I'd like to. If I could be sure . . .

RITA (*losing control*). Don't you listen to them, Russ! What do they know about it? A . . . a drunken old bum, and a kid that . . . Oh, I'm sorry, but Russ! Do you hear? You shan't listen, I tell you. We're going away; we are, I say!

PETE. Mrs. Day, you wouldn't want him to . . .

RUSS. Suppose it were our chance, Rita. At most it would be only a few months longer. Then we could have everything you wanted; then we'd be *really* rich . . .

RITA (*turning to him*). Rich! You think that's what I want, do you? Money! Gold! I hate it! All I want is a home and babies, and you, Russ. To quit this gambling and fighting against hope, and slowly dying when we should be living. It's not fair! You know I'll stick

SHOOTING STAR

by you whatever you do! You *can't* take advantage of that; say we'll give it up, Russ! Can't you see . . . it . . . it's killing me, Russ!

RUSS (*putting his arm around her*). You're upset, dear. It isn't as bad as all that. You do know the only reason I want to go on is so that you'll be happier in the end. We owe it to ourselves, Rita.

RITA (*dully*). Yes, I know. Then . . . we're going?

[*Pete and Billy go over to the window and converse. Pete pulls pencil and paper from his pocket and starts drawing, talking to Billy meanwhile.*]

RUSS. It'll be for only a little while, dear. After it's all over, you'll be so glad we did. We'll come back and . . .

RITA (*softly*). I'll never . . . come back.

BILLY. Come here a minute, Russ. Pete has drawn a map of the new mine. If you're with us, we're going to call it the Rita.

RUSS (*joining them*). Fine! That name should bring luck to anyone. Did you hear that, Rita?

RITA (*in lifeless tone*). Yes, dear.

[*Russ, Billy and Pete huddle together in order to see the map. Rita walks slowly toward the bunk. Her eyes fall upon the dress, lying where it was flung after Russ tore it. She picks it up, smooths it out mechanically, and sits on the bunk, staring at the dress in her lap.*]

PETE (*pointing to the map*). There it is, and if it's not pay dirt I'll eat the tail of my burro.

BILLY. It's our big chance at last!

RUSS. Now let's see; we need two hundred for food; about fifty for tools, with the ones we have here; a hundred for . . .

[*Rita sobs gently as the curtain falls.*]

**AN EVENING REVERIE
OF PHILIPPINE PEASANTS**

**By
WALTER ROBB**

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CAST

GIRL.

MOTHER.

GORIO, *the father*.

SON.

SCENE. The home of a peasant in the Philippine Islands.

TIME. The present.

NOMENCLATURE:

amo, master

sabuñgan, cockpit

camarin, granary

cavan, measure of 97 pounds

palay (pronounced *pali'*), rice on the stalk.

AN EVENING REVERIE OF PHILIPPINE PEASANTS

GIRL. There is gold in the sunset this evening.

MOTHER. Yes, and gold in the harvest. The world is beautiful.

FATHER. Idle women's words! Gold! Beautiful world! Bah! Where is the gold? Where is the beauty? Once it was in your faces, this beauty, but it very early left them. See, the gold you saw in the sunset has already turned to graying dusk. Where are your gold and beauty, I say? Where are they?

MOTHER. In the harvest, father.

GIRL. And in the sunset glow, father; it is God's benediction upon us.

FATHER. No. They are not in the harvest, nor in us, the harvesters; nor are they in the sunset. God does not pause to bless such poor creatures as we are. We are creatures, of our amo; and do you think he will bless us?

MOTHER. Well, with all the harvest of rice, made by our labor and God's timely rains and sunshine, we shall be free from the amo. Next year we shall work for ourselves.

FATHER. Idle women's words again! Will you never learn from your flail handle? Forty years you have been to school with this harsh master, and yet have not learned his first lesson.

GIRL. Talk less in riddles, father dear.

FATHER. I am talking in figures, not riddles, my weakling daughter.

MOTHER. The rice will be two hundred cavans, no less: the biggest harvest we have ever had.

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FATHER. No less than two hundred cavan, at one peso a cavan.

MOTHER. Why do you say that, Gorio? The market is three pesos. It may go even higher.

GIRL. Oh, I am sure it will go higher! I am sure God has heard my prayers! I am sure, sure of it! I see his promise in the rainbow. Look! Hasn't the padre told us that in Spain the people believe that there is a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow?

FATHER. No need to look for God's promise in rainbows. Look for premonitions of storms there, and go and cover the rice bins. It is our promise in the amo's book you must look to.

MOTHER (*in an alarmed tone*). Our promise in the amo's book? Who made it?

FATHER. I did, to be sure. Who else, pray, would make it?

MOTHER. Are we in debt again, father? Tell us the truth.

GIRL. Yes, tell us the truth, here, now. Why are we in debt this year, when we have all worked so hard?

SON (*who has been working silently, laughs in bitterness*). Tell them, father! Ha, ha! Why are we in debt *this year*? It is only my twentieth year, so it is only the twentieth year that I know we have been in debt.

FATHER (*unabashed*). Well, there was the baby's funeral.

MOTHER (*she and girl cross themselves*). Ah, yes. The baby's funeral.

[*Quiet sobs rack her. After a fit of coughing, she wipes her lips with her handkerchief.*]

GIRL. But brother made the coffin; the whole expense was but ten pesos; and I did the washing at the amo's house for two months afterward.

MOTHER. And I washed too, before the baby came, and served the doña and her children.

FATHER. You women are my despair! You know it is

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in the bond that we all work for the amo when we are not in the fields.

MOTHER. Yes, it is true; but I thought . . .

GIRL. He told me he would pay me for the work. He talked to me . . . that day the doña went to place the children in the convent. He used soft words and told me I might stay at the house always and get good wages, only . . .

FATHER. I heard his words! Have you been wondering why I wouldn't let you go when you begged so hard? It made the amo angry, and of course he credited you with nothing for the work you had already done. He just shook the bond in my face. With him, it was either the bond or my daughter.

GIRL (*comprehending at last*): Father!

[*She takes his hand and presses it to her cheek.*]

MOTHER. Then we still owe the ten pesos; that is only ten cavans out of the two hundred we shall have.

FATHER. No. We owe more, still more; more than we can pay. It was this way. After I quarreled with the amo over Maria, he feared we would leave him. He thought, I suppose, we might go to Nueva Ecija and try homesteading. So he played it very nice with me for a time. He let me have money for the sabuñgan, all I wanted to bet. I wanted so much to win. Win big! Win like the amo always does. Then, indeed, we should have gone to the homestead country and been free. But I lost. Later I found it was crooked betting. And the amo shook the bond in my face again.

[*He breaks off suddenly, works feverishly for a moment, then gazes balefully at the glory fading in the western sky. The women watching him, sense his mood. At last he turns to his work again; he pours a basket of winnowed rice into the bin and brings the empty basket back to the women.*]

MOTHER. Then you were not working at the big house all those Sundays?

EVENING REVERIE OF PHILIPPINE PEASANTS

FATHER. No. I lied to you. I was gambling. The fever rose in me like a plague in the blood. I could not resist.

MOTHER. I know, I know. You wanted to win for us. How much did the amo let you have for this gambling?

FATHER. Two hundred pesos.

GIRL (*aghast, as are the others, at the debt saddled upon the family*). Two hundred pesos! Father!

[*He is silent, brooding.*]

MOTHER (*wearily*). At what rate? The same as in the old bond?

FATHER. Yes, at the old rate, one cavan of palay for each peso, delivered to the camarin at harvest time.

GIRL (*hand on mother's shoulder and gazing into the west, where the dark has come and a storm is gathering*). And this is the harvest time.

ALL (*watching the storm, against which they must cover the rice*). Harvest time! Yes.

[*They look into each other's eyes, reading unspoken thoughts. The father is first to break the spell.*]

FATHER. So there is no gold in the harvest, I tell you.

MOTHER. No gold in the harvest . . . this year. Maybe next . . .

SON (*with the same bitter laugh as before*). Mother!

[*He falls to work again, making a palm cover for the rice bins.*]

GIRL (*musings aloud*). And no gold in the sunset . . . no benediction . . . no hope . . . Oh!

FATHER. Daughter, what was the prayer you wished God to answer?

GIRL (*turning her distracted gaze toward him and gradually regaining self-control*). It was for the younger ones, father. I wanted them to go to school, to have chances brother and I could not have . . . to learn . . .

FATHER. Well, they shall learn here. Son, whittle out some more flails this evening. Rosa is now fifteen; the

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flail for her may be made almost as heavy as Maria's or mother's.

SON. Yes, father.

[He starts to put the completed palm cover over the rice bin.]

FATHER (*tugging at his corner of the palm cover, and making it fast to the bin with a rattan tie*). Well, it isn't very strong, son, but it will do. Tomorrow we begin hauling. The women can finish the threshing. If it rains enough we must get the plows out. Get a torch made; we must find our way to the hut. The children will be waiting for their supper. I'll hitch up the carabao. Pile in the baskets, mother. Ready? Hurry up, Maria girl. The rainbow's gone, so don't be searching for your pot of gold at the end of it.

SON (*with his bitter laugh*). Gold! Peasants' jokes are always edged with iron.

Curtain

A PATERNITY CASE

By

GERTRUDE ALLEN

CAST

BEVERLY KANE.

HESTER KANE, *his wife.*

JEAN VERNON, *a friend of Hester's.*

SCENE. Living room in the Kane's city home. It is obviously a room of wealth, but there is nothing superfluous in it.

TIME. The present.

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When the curtain rises, Jean Vernon is seated at the desk downstage right, her back to the room. Enter Beverly Kane center. He has on his hat and coat, and is carrying in his arms a long white bundle, which he is obviously guarding nervously. At sight of Jean's back he stops short.

BEVERLY (*in suppressed excitement*). Oh! Hello, Jean.
What are you doing here?

JEAN (*not turning, still writing*). Don't call the police.
I didn't break in. I came over to lunch with Hester, and she said I might wait here till my appointment with Dr. Graydon. Hello, yourself.

BEVERLY (*not advancing from the doorway*). Where's Hester?

JEAN (*glances at her wrist watch, then reaches for the desk engagement calendar*). Hm . . . well, now she must just about be through telling the Independent Club the difference between Jeffersonian and Rooseveltian democracy. She had three engagements this afternoon.

BEVERLY. Say, I've got something for her.

[*Advancing.*]

JEAN (*still not turning, folding her letter*). She won't like it.

BEVERLY (*grinning down at the bundle*). Oh, she won't, won't she!

JEAN. She never has liked anything you've brought her yet.

BEVERLY. But *this* is different.

JEAN (*licking her envelope*). Oh, Beverly, you're such a dear! Promise me you won't ever grow up!

BEVERLY. Jean, aren't you ever going to turn around?

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JEAN (*searching in desk*). As soon as I can find a stamp. Where does Hester keep her stamps? I hate to lose all this time from looking at you . . .

[*The bundle in Beverly's arms cries. Jean leaps up and around, the letter dropping to the floor.*]

JEAN. Beverly Kane! (*She rushes to him.*) What have you got! (*Looking at the bundle.*) A . . .

BEVERLY (*nodding, delightedly*). Yep, you've said it, Jean.

JEAN. A baby! Oh, the dear little thing! (*She seizes the bundle, goes over to divan upstage left, and sits.*) Whose is it, Beverly?

BEVERLY. Clif Hallowell's.

JEAN (*sympathetically*). Oh! Yes, it looks like Rosalie, poor girl. How did you get it?

BEVERLY. Clif brought it 'round to the office to me.

JEAN. To the office! Why, how long are you going to keep it?

BEVERLY. Always!

JEAN (*almost dropping the bundle*). Always!

BEVERLY. Always, forever, till the Big Dipper bails out the Milky Way; that is to say, it's mine!

JEAN. Yours!

BEVERLY. I mean it's ours, Hester's and mine, as it should be with babies.

JEAN (*overcome*). Beverly Kane!

BEVERLY (*immune to her meaning. Bowing*). At last: the Proud Father.

JEAN. Why, why, what are you thinking of? (*The clock strikes five. Jean leaps up and lays the bundle down.*)

Gracious! My watch must be wrong. I'll be late! It's a possible job, O dear! (*Flings on her hat and coat.*)

I've got to go. (*Looking toward baby.*) What are you going to do with it till Hester returns?

BEVERLY. I don't know. Do you have to do anything with them? (*Troubled.*) I thought, of course, Hester would be home. What do you do with them?

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JEAN (*grinning*). Oh, just whatever seems to work. Turn on the radio, or stand on your head, or sing to them in Arabic, or take out the safety pin, or put a pillow over their heads . . .

BEVERLY. No, seriously. I never thought of Hester's not being here. I ought to have telephoned, but (*All smiles again.*) I wanted to surprise her.

JEAN. Well, don't worry. You'll surprise her all right! *A baby!* (*Turning at door center.*) How the Lord ever created anything as adorable and as stupid as you, Beverly Kane, beats me! But I wish I had another just like you! 'By!

[*Exit quickly center. Beverly stands a moment thinking, then he crosses to the bundle on the divan.*]

BEVERLY (*to the bundle*). Say, you're going to be a good kid, aren't you? You aren't going to give daddy any trouble till mumsie gets home, are you? No, sir, you're all right! Want to go in and lie on daddy's bed? Nice, comfy bed, brand new Simmons mattress, eh? (*Picks up bundle, and starts toward door left.*) Daddy's good little boy. Daddy's good little boy! (*Capitulating joyously into baby talk.*) Dood itty boy! Daddy's dood itty boy.

[*Exit left. In a moment Hester Kane enters center. She is in street clothes, and has a leather brief case and the evening papers in her hand. She enters a little absent-mindedly, and going over to the desk she lays down her case, and spreads out one of the papers, which she reads absordedly, as she takes off her gloves, hat and coat. Enter Beverly left. At the sight of Hester's back, he gives a sigh of relief.*]

BEVERLY (*crossing to Hester quickly*). Hello, darling!

HESTER (*turning to him, suspiciously*). "Darling"?

What are you trying to hide, Beverly? You sound exactly as if you had been in the cooky jar.

BEVERLY (*kissing her, and trying to hold down his excitement*). How sweet you look this evening! How did

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the speechifying go? Who came out ahead, Jefferson or Roosevelt?

HESTER. We had a perfectly splendid question period. I don't think I ever heard readier, or more intelligent questions. (*Looking at him attentively.*) I still have a feeling I ought to search your pockets: cigarettes, or all-day-suckers, or something equally heretical.

[*Beverly grins ecstatically.*]

HESTER (*uncertainly*). After all I said the other night, I know you couldn't have a potted plant up your sleeve.

BEVERLY. Nothing like that! Just you wait a minute!

[*Rushes off left. Hester takes her wraps out right, re-entering at once, just as Beverly enters left with the baby.*]

HESTER (*stopping dead*). What . . .

BEVERLY (*advancing to center, joyously*). Come, see him, Hester!

[*Hester stands petrified, unable to speak.*]

BEVERLY. Come, don't be bashful. He wants his mumsie.

HESTER. Is . . . that . . . a . . . baby?

BEVERLY. You bet! The best baby yet. And he's for you!

HESTER. For . . .

BEVERLY. Aren't you going to look at him?

HESTER (*witheringly*). Just let me get this straight, Beverly. That is a *baby*, not a potted plant, or a floor lamp, or another dinner set, or a grand piano, but a baby!

BEVERLY. Ah, say, see here!

HESTER (*in the same tone*). It's a baby, and it's *for me*?

BEVERLY. What's the matter with you, Hester?

HESTER (*dropping into chair right*). You have brought me home . . . a *baby*!

BEVERLY. But I thought you would be pleased, honest, I did, Hester. I thought . . .

HESTER (*interrupting*). Why, it is only last week that you gave me your word of honor, after all I said about

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that gardenia, that you would never bring me home anything more.

BEVERLY (*eagerly*). Oh, but that was about those amaryllis and gardenias, Hester! I know now you don't want any plants to take care of, or, or anything like that. But a baby! Why, I thought every woman wanted a baby.

[*He presses the bundle to him protectively.*]

HESTER. I know nothing about all other women, and I don't ask you to, but I do think that after ten years of marriage you might know something about your own wife.

BEVERLY. But a baby, I thought every woman wanted a baby (*Pityingly.*) especially those who couldn't have one, Hester.

HESTER. Beverly Kane! How could you think I wanted a baby when I have always consistently said I didn't?

BEVERLY (*eagerly*). I thought that was because you were so noble; you wouldn't let me know how badly you felt inside; you just kept up a brave front for others. You are like that, you know.

HESTER. Beverly, you are beyond everything. How could I be noble and be telling and acting a lie? What kind of a wife do you think I would have proved to be by this time if I had founded my wifehood on deceiving you? I have never deceived you, or anyone, for that matter, and I certainly don't intend to begin now. I am simply overwhelmed by that baby!

BEVERLY. Well, as a matter of fact, if you don't want it, so am I! But he's a darned nice one.

[*Looking down at bundle.*]

HESTER. I suppose I ought to have known something would happen after all. I ought to have been on my guard when I saw you oggling that life-size photograph of Fujiyama and those five cats and two dogs Sunday evening. You had a lean and hungry look. I confess

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it did flash through my mind that I might have left one door unguarded, and if I didn't look out you'd be bringing me home a tiara, or an ivory Noah's Ark, — but a baby! (*She puts her hand to her head.*) I ask you, Beverly, how could a woman ever guess that her husband would surprise her with a baby?

BEVERLY (*turning and crossing to divan left, and laying the baby down carefully, grimly*). Well, of course, times have changed. Men are having more and more to do with children now. (*He pokes a finger into the baby's hand.*) Good thing, too, by George. Something besides "wine, women and song" for us to think of.

HESTER. Very well, you may think baby all you want; I've no objection. But I do object to your bringing a baby home to me. Now, what can we do with my part of it? Return it whence it came?

BEVERLY (*straightening, quickly*). Impossible! He's Hallowell's child, and Hally's gone off for a tour of the African jungles. No way to reach him. Started in his own plane at four this afternoon. Wants to get away from everything on account of Rosalie, you know. Besides, I've adopted him.

HESTER (*rearing up*). Adopted him! (*She sinks back.*) But can you legally without me?

BEVERLY. Legally. I'm sure I don't know. I haven't adopted him legally, I've adopted him honorably. We both signed papers, however, Hally and I, and had them witnessed and put in a safe deposit box. That was just in case he and you and I should suddenly all sit up and die. It would make things clearer for the kid.

HESTER (*rising, desperately*). Well, I have come to the end. I will simply have to refuse to accept anything you bring home to me: bracelets, book-ends, floor lamps, aquariums, canaries, dinner sets, Buddhas, potted plants, and babies. I begin with the baby. You have adopted him; you have brought him home. He is yours. Perhaps now you will learn that I am not noble, I am not a

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kind liar, *and* I am not a collector of any kind. I am what I say, and what I seem: I am a woman determined to live her own life. What are you going to call your baby, Beverly?

BEVERLY (*half dazed by the preceding declaration of independence*). Why, I hadn't thought of that. He must have a name. I didn't think to ask Hally, what a shame! What would you call it, Hester?

HESTER (*crisply*). I don't approve of outsiders naming children. The names never fit. You will have to name him yourself.

BEVERLY. Oh, say, look here, Hester . . .

HESTER (*interrupting, mercilessly*). Where are you going to keep him, and what are you going to feed him? Both these matters will have to be settled at once. At any moment he may wake up and begin to cry. Then what are you going to do?

BEVERLY. I'm awfully sorry you don't want him, Hester. I could kick myself around the world and back again to think I got him for you when it was all a mistake. But he's here now, and Hally's gone, and . . . why, I don't know a tinker's damn about babies. And besides, I haven't got the time . . . Good Lord . . . to bring him up!

HESTER. Yes, I'm satisfied you have made a difficult problem for yourself.

BEVERLY (*wildly*). But, Hester, look here. Cut out this nonsense. He isn't *mine*, he's *ours*. You've . . . yes, really, you've got to take charge of him. I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry, as I said, but the deed is done. We've just got to accept it. It's all bosh, you know, to talk about a baby's being mine.

HESTER. You are losing valuable time, Beverly. You need to get all the information about this new job you can find, and get it at once. It's one thing to walk into a business position for which you are unprepared. It is a very different matter to risk human life. In a mo-

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ment, as I said, that child is going to cry, for something. For what? Why don't you get Dr. Graydon to come over? He knows babies, if anyone does, and he knows Hally.

[Beverly stands for a moment speechless, looking at his wife, horror growing in his eyes. Suddenly he drops down on the divan beside the bundle.]

BEVERLY. Good Lord, Hester; *(He leans his head on his hands.)* I never thought you'd go back on me like this. I can't understand it.

HESTER. "Back on you!" And did you think that trying to saddle my life with a job like this was exactly going forward with me?

BEVERLY *(rising)*. I'm frightfully sorry. I can see I didn't think, I mean I thought you'd really be tickled to death to have him; honest, I did! *(Hopefully.)* I begin to get you! If you'll just take this poor little kid, I'll never — upon my word, Hester, I'll never — bring you another gift of any kind, living or dead. Upon my word, Hester.

[He strides toward her. He takes but a few steps when the baby gives a whimper. He stops short. The baby gives a cry.]

BEVERLY *(pleading frantically)*. Hester?

HESTER *(turning toward door right)*. You forget you made me that same promise after you brought the canary. Dr. Graydon's number has been changed; it is Kirkland 34890. *(She starts to open door, then turns back.)* Oh, by the way, don't let Dr. Graydon sidetrack you with a nurse. Hally would never have turned his child over to a nurse, as you know. And you have adopted him honorably.

[She sweeps from the room right.]

BEVERLY *(quivering with fury, addressing the closed door)*. By George, I call that . . . yellow. *(Turning.)* Yellow! "Don't let him sidetrack you with a nurse." No,

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no! Don't let anybody help me! (*Beginning to pace the room, raging.*) Discipline him. That's it; he's good-for-nothing. He likes kids! Good he's in a hole he can't get out of. Fun, isn't it? Well, I *will* get out of it, by George; and I'll get out of it honorably, and I'll make you . . .

[*He catches sight of Jean's forgotten letter lying on the floor where it dropped when she heard the baby.*]

BEVERLY (*springing to pick it up*). Manna from Heaven!

Jean! (*He stands with the letter in his hands, a smile slowly spreading over his face.*) Jean!

[*Reënter Hester right.*]

HESTER. Did you get Dr. Graydon?

BEVERLY (*smoothly*). I was just about to call him.

(*Picks up desk phone.*) Hello, please give me Kirk-

land 34890. Dr. Graydon's office? This is Beverly

Kane. Is Miss Jean Vernon there? (*Hester starts.*)

Good! Will you please tell her I have a job for her?

Yes, yes, it's a baby. No, not Mrs. Kane's, mine; yes,

mine. (*The baby cries.*) Ask Miss Vernon to hurry,

will you please; hurry! Tell her it's *a paternity case*.

(*Hangs up the phone. Coolly, to Hester.*) You for-

got, didn't you, that babies are Jean's business, as well

as Graydon's?

HESTER (*studying him*). I confess, I didn't think of Jean.

BEVERLY. As to Hally, he would very likely prefer hav-

ing Jean bring up his child to having you do it. He

had great respect for Jean as a nurse, as well as a

woman.

HESTER. Yes, Hally liked Jean.

BEVERLY. Come to think of it, who wouldn't? I never

thought much about Jean before, but now that I put my

mind to it, I think she will make an ideal mother for my

boy.

HESTER. A . . . mother . . . for your boy?

BEVERLY (*throwing up his arms joyously*). I feel ten

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years younger since I telephoned. Let the baby cry.
What care I? His mother is coming.

HESTER. Are you planning to keep the baby here?

BEVERLY. That will be as Jean says. If she thinks it would be better for him to be out in the country, why, I'll commute.

HESTER. What?

BEVERLY. Of course, I don't like commuting, but if it's better for the kid, I am ready to do it. I shall leave everything to Jean.

HESTER. Beverly Kane! I really think there is something the matter with you tonight.

BEVERLY. No, there isn't, but there would have been if I hadn't thought of Jean.

HESTER. Do you mean that you would go and set up another home somewhere with Jean for the sake of that baby?

BEVERLY. What else can I do? He's mine, and he's got to be brought up. I told Hally that I would give the child a father and a mother. And Jean will be a darned good mother, I don't have to worry about that. And, by George, I've thought of something else. Jean adores gardenias! We'll have potted plants all over the house!

HESTER. Have you considered the talk there would be if you went off with Jean and that baby?

BEVERLY (*cheerfully*). Oh, Jean will know what to do about that.

HESTER. Jean seems to know everything.

BEVERLY. Well, I admit I'm in a mood to appreciate her; a drowning man is likely to think well of his life-line, isn't he?

[*Hester does not answer.*]

BEVERLY. I only pray nothing happens. I mean, I hope there won't be any reason why Jean can't take the job, won't want the kid, won't be like you, in any way.

HESTER. You needn't worry; Jean will take the job. But she won't take it for the baby, don't fool yourself.

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She'll take it for you. Jean Vernon would take anything, she would take twenty babies, for you!

BEVERLY. Would she? Are you sure? Gee, Hester, I believe it is going to feel mighty soothing to live with someone who isn't all the time just thinking of herself. There she is now!

[*Rushes out center. Hester begins to pace the room, but when she hears Jean and Beverly coming, she controls herself and stops. Enter Beverly and Jean center.*]

BEVERLY (*bringing Jean forward with his arm about her*). Hester, here's the new mother!

HESTER (*trying to be nonchalant*). Oh, hello, Jean.

JEAN. Hello, Hester. (*She goes to baby and readjusts him professionally. Comes back.*) Now, let's get this clear and straight. (*To Beverly.*) Just exactly what is your proposition?

BEVERLY. I want you to come and live with me and bring up my child.

HESTER. Beverly!

JEAN. Hm . . . I'd like that!

BEVERLY. I leave all the details to you. I have complete faith in your brain, and heart, Jean.

JEAN. That's nice. And I have in yours. When do you want me to begin?

BEVERLY. Here and now.

JEAN (*smiling*). Now, but not here. Hester doesn't want to be bothered, you know, and I should want the baby to have the right of way.

BEVERLY. All right, where do we take him?

JEAN. What about your country house? An ideal place for children.

BEVERLY. Yes, I had thought of it. Shall I get the car?

HESTER (*unable to control herself*). This is ridiculous.

JEAN (*quickly*). Yes, it is. But it's your fault, not ours, remember.

BEVERLY (*crossing to door left*). Yes, please always re-

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member, Hester, that it was your attitude toward the baby that drove us from the house. (*To Jean.*) I'll get my hat and coat.

[*Exit left.*]

JEAN (*turning to Hester, challengingly*). Well, what are you going to do?

HESTER (*furiously*). What are you? Are you going off with Beverly like this, Jean Vernon?

JEAN. Somebody's got to! And he gave you first chance. Besides, you will remember, Hester, that way back after the canary episode, I warned you that if you didn't try to give Beverly a little wifely understanding, instead of always seeing that he didn't understand you, something would happen. And happen it has! Of course, I'm going with him. He's offered me a nurse's job. I'm out of one, and I need one badly. (*Wickedly.*) And won't I just love having him buying out the florist shop for me! Bringing me those home-coming presents he so delights in! Oh, boy! What a life when you understand a man like Beverly! Even if he doesn't understand you!

BEVERLY (*outside left*). Jean, want to come here a minute, and see about taking some of these things?

JEAN (*wheeling and going left*). Right-O.

[*Exit left. Hester stands rigid a moment, then turns slowly, goes to divan, hesitates. She hears Jean and Beverly laugh outside, stoops down quickly, swoops the baby up in her arms, and hurries out right with him. Jean and Beverly enter left; Beverly has his coat on, and is carrying his hat and a traveling bag.*]

JEAN (*at divan*). Why . . . why the baby, the baby's gone!

BEVERLY (*excited*). Gone! It can't be! (*Drops on floor and looks under divan, alarmed.*) By George, it is!

[*Gets up.*]

JEAN. Hester has taken it!

A PATERNITY CASE

BEVERLY. Hester! Impossible! She couldn't touch the thing. It's been kidnapped.

JEAN. Don't be absurd. Hester wasn't going to stand with hands folded and let anything as peculiar happen as for you to go off to your country home with another woman and a baby! She's got too much sense for that. She'd do something. (*Grinning.*) She's checkmated your bluff.

BEVERLY (*groaning*). I might have known she would. (*All nerves.*) But, the baby?

JEAN. Yes, the great question now is: what has she done with the baby? Everything hangs on that.

BEVERLY. Come on, we've got to find him. You don't know what she'll do. Honest, Jean, I don't know whether I'm on my head or my feet.

[*Starts to cross to door right; Hester, opening the door, is face to face with him now at center.*]

HESTER (*to Beverly, sweetly*). I've put the pot of gardenias at the foot of little Beverly's bed, dear, so he'll see them the first thing when he wakes.

BEVERLY (*stunned*). Little Beverly?

HESTER. Tomorrow maybe you can find time to bring him home a few toys, can you? Soft, woolly ones, you know.

BEVERLY. Toys? Are you asking me to bring home . . .

HESTER (*seeing Jean start off center*). Not going, Jean?

JEAN (*turning*). Yes, I see a nurse isn't needed long on a paternity case.

HESTER (*laughing*). Don't go, please, Beverly and I both want you, and I need you to help. I can't give all of my time, even to our baby.

JEAN (*coming forward quickly*). Hester, you're great.

BEVERLY. She's noble! (*Ecstatically.*) And so I was right all the time! You did want a baby after all!

HESTER (*sinking into a chair, overcome*). Beverly Kane!

Curtain

OL' CAPTAIN

By

VIRGIL L. BAKER

(Based on a short story by Charles Morrow Wilson.)

CAST

MAME HOLMES, *an invalid of about 48 or 50 years of age. She lies on a crude day-bed propped up with a box. Her face is sunken and wrinkled, and wisps of dull, rusty-brown hair fall across her temples.*

CHARLIE HOLMES, *her husband. He is about 55 years old, and has lost his left arm. He is hardened in body and mind. He wears a black felt hat and an overall jumper suit, and blouse with the left sleeve doubled up.*

MRS. WADDELL, *a neighbor who helps with the housework. Cheerful, robust, and sympathetic. She wears a house dress with apron.*

HENRY, *the peddler, a young man of about 20. Energetic, hopeful, and very much in love with a girl with whom he hopes soon to set up housekeeping. He wears a felt hat, a dark coat with no vest, and trousers of a lighter color. He is sincere, earnest, and a good salesman by force of circumstance.*

SCENE. A woodcutter's shack in Northwest Arkansas.

TIME. The present.

OL' CAPTAIN

Down left is a towel on a peg, cracked mirror, and a washbasin on a three-legged stool. Just beyond, a door of heavy oak boards opens into the room. Upper left, there is a table with kitchen utensils, and a bucket of water with gourd dipper. Upper left center there is a sheet-iron wood stove with a pipe running through the back wall. To right of stove is a stack of hickory firewood, cut stove length. Upper right center, in back wall, there is a window with a piece of cheesecloth draped over it for a curtain. Through the window, a wood is visible, with autumn leaves of russet, yellow, and green. Right center, near the wall, stands an iron cot. Articles of clothing hang on the right wall at the upper corner. A plain, very small oak table with a dingy cloth is center. A rocking chair is between the table and the cot. Several split-hickory bottom straight chairs are about the room. The walls are papered with newspapers. An opening, with dingy worn drapes, just above the cot, leads to a lean-to.

Mame Holmes lies on the cot, her head and shoulders raised by inserting a chair under the head of the mattress. Her face is drawn and furrowed and brown. Her unkempt hair straggles about her face. The veins in her long bony fingers are blue and prominent. Mrs. Waddell, a neighbor, is robust, slow of wit, but hospitable and sympathetic. She is preparing the noon meal for Mame and Charlie Holmes.

MRS. WADDELL (stirring the boiling bean soup). The beans is about done. (She takes a small quantity of the soup on the spoon and, after blowing it, tastes it.) I fergot the seasonin'!

[She goes to work-table to look for salt.]

OL' CAPTAIN

MAME (*seeing that Mrs. Waddell is not finding the salt*).
Hit's in that saucer, the blue one, behind the lard can.

MRS. WADDELL. I'm shore glad I thought to taste it.
Bean soup ain't bean soup without seasonin'.
[*Comes back with salt.*]

MAME. There warn't enough salt-pork in it to season hit proper.

MRS. WADDELL (*adding salt*). You could only jest taste the salt a little from the salt pork.

MAME (*watching her add salt*). Put in a right smart bit.
Charlie always whants to taste the salt strong.

MRS. WADDELL (*adding more salt, and then tasting the soup again*). Hit's right strong now. Do you feel like eatin' some?

MAME (*sighing and sinking back*). Not now.

MRS. WADDELL. I'll hurry an' set out the deeshes. Hit's gittin' late an' your man'll be wonderin' what's happened. I couldn't git around somehow this mornin', Tessie down with the measles an' all. Tessie's a great help about the house.

MAME. Charlie's strange that-a-way. He won't come to his meals till he's called. You'd better blow fer him now. You kin have the vittals set out by time he gits here. The horn's on the wall by the door.

MRS. WADDELL. Which-a-way is he to-day?
[*Takes the horn and goes to door.*]

MAME. Over to O'Detts line. He's fixin' fence.

MRS. WADDELL (*steps outside and blows the horn; returns*). I reckon he'd hear it.

MAME. He'll hear hit. Hit'll take him quite a spell to git here. Hit's most a mile over to O'Detts line.

MRS. WADDELL. He ain't like my Oscar or he'd ben here long afore this. Trust my Oscar fer bein' on time fer his meals. His stomik's a reg'ler timepiece.

MAME. Charlie ain't never ben regular to his meals. An' he's worse now an' he ever was. Jest sets and pecks

OL' CAPTAIN

at his food like he ain't no stomik fer it. We ain't, Charlie ner me neither, what we wonst was.

MRS. WADDELL. You'll be on yer feet agin afore long.

MAME (*sighing*). Jest all tuckered out somehow. Lyin' this-a-way fer so long, hit's hard to keep one's sperit up.

MRS. WADDELL. You mustn't lose heart. You remember ol' Mis' Clement. Laid nigh onto three year with that broke hip o' hers; stunk till a body couldn't hardly stay in the house fer the smell of the bed sores on her, but she's up and around, an' right spry. I seen her Saturday at market with her eggs. Don't seem possible!

MAME. She had he'p.

MRS. WADDELL. Yes. There never was a man like Luke Clement.

MAME. He tuk keer o' her like she was a baby. Never left her. A woman kin stand a heap o' sufferin' when a man goes havers.

MRS. WADDELL. I'm doin' the best I kin, Mrs. Holmes, an' if it warn't fer Tessie . . .

MAME. If it warn't fer you I wouldn't be here today.

That ain't what I mean. Charlie jest ain't no hand to . . . (*Sighing*.) Oh, if I hadn't lost Henry. Henry was a sweet child, an' if I jest had him . . .

MRS. WADDELL. I heerd Henry spoke of by the neighbors, but not by you afore. He was *your* boy, warn't he?

MAME. Henry was my boy, yes; not Charlie's.

MRS. WADDELL. You mean . . . ?

MAME. No, we was never married. When I tol' Forgey I was carryin' Henry, he . . . I don't see why I'm talkin' this-a-way. I ain't never tol' this to no one . . .

MRS. WADDELL. I've heerd talk, but I never . . . You kin tell me, Mrs. Holmes.

MAME (*excitedly*). I've never talked. But folks know, and they talk. It's hurt. I've kept it all stored up inside me all these years an' now somethin's broke, an' I ain't got the strength not to talk.

OL' CAPTAIN

MRS. WADDELL. Does a body good to talk. Some's so pent up they's miserable.

MAME. I ben that-a-way twenty odd year . . . holdin' back . . . fearin' to speak o' what was breakin' my heart.

MRS. WADDELL. Hit's a deep feelin' I have fer folks that-a-way. Hit's a-pityin' ye I am.

MAME. Ever sense somethin' snapped here when I was hurt in the chest I've ben different . . . Like the end was comin'.

MRS. WADDELL. Oh, no, Mrs. Holmes, not that. Hit's only fer a while, I'm thinkin' ye'll be . . .

MAME. I'm sartin, Mrs. Waddell. Charlie thinks hit's nuthin', but I've a feelin' that tells me my up and about days is done. I'm not fretin' none. Jest lyin' hyar, thinkin', an' feelin', feelin' most. That's why Henry keeps comin' into my mind . . . little feller . . . I, I never was no he'p to him.

MRS. WADDELL. Hit ain't ben within yer power, Mrs. Holmes.

MAME. I've often thought me, as I lay here, I should ought to have gone with Forgy.

MRS. WADDELL. You done yer best.

MAME. Henry needed me wors'n Charlie; he knew what love and pity is. Charlie needed only a woman. But I didn't see hit then. Charlie with his arm gone, an' all account of me. I staid with Charlie, but I done wrong. Now I see better.

MRS. WADDELL. You'd best rest yerse'f, Mrs. Holmes. Talkin' of sich has unquieted ye. Kin I lay ye back an' make ye more comfortable?

MAME. No. This is doin' me good, more'n you know, Mrs. Waddell. Charlie's goin' to be here presently. I'm goin' to tell you what I've never told a livin' soul, what's been burnin' in me all these years.

MRS. WADDELL. You'd better rest, Mrs. Holmes. You ain't so strong, you know.

OL' CAPTAIN

MAME. No. I loved Forgy an' I never have Charlie. When I tol' Forgy about bein' like I was by him he got scairt — we was both so young then — an' he never come back till Henry was eight year ol'. Henry was sich a fine lad. In the spring I'd take him out under the great oak tree above the house there, an' he'd pick flowers and fetch to me. I'd put the flowers in his hair and let the wind blow out his long gold curls. He would try to climb the great tree. Ol' Captain we always called him . . . put his little arms rount the trunk as fer as he could . . . an' I'd tell him the tree was like his pappy, Forgy, tall and strong. Charlie suspected Henry an' me loved that tree, an' atter he'd sent Henry away, he swore he'd cut Ol' Captain if I ever spoke Henry's name in his presence. I had to promise I wouldn't. Then one mornin' Forgy come walkin' into the cabin when I was makin' bread. I turned from my work and there he was standin' thar, in that very door. Henry was playin' with the pans over here. He'd come to take me and Henry and make a home fer us. He was a great tall man now. I'd never quit lovin' him; ain't to this day. Then Charlie come in and found Forgy in the cabin with me.

MRS. WADDELL (*who has gone to the door to glance for Charlie*). He's comin' . . . beyond the cottonwood.

MAME (*hurrying to finish*). They fit. Charlie was about to shoot Forgy with his rifle gun, but Forgy was too quick fer him. He grabbed Charlie's axe which was settin' by the wood stove and swung at him and took him so deep in the arm he lost it. Forgy never come back. Charlie ben a watchin' fer him all these years. They'd kill each other today if they met. But Forgy never come back. Hit's too late now if he does. Charlie wouldn't let Henry stay on the cabin after that. I lost 'em both. Parson Johnson tuk Henry fer a spell till he died, an' then he went to an orfling asylum, an' then I lost him.

OL' CAPTAIN

MRS. WADDELL (*undertone*). Charlie's here.

MAME (*leaning back and sobbing silently*). Give him his vittals.

[*Charlie Holmes enters. He is tall, silent and grim. His face is leathery and windscorched. He is a powerful man with gaunt and furrowed features. His left arm is missing.*]

CHARLIE (*tossing his hat on peg behind door*). Vittals is late.

MRS. WADDELL. Tessie come down with the measles an' I couldn't git hyar sooner. (*Bustling.*) I've got things most set out.

CHARLIE. Don't rush yerse'f none fer me.

[*Goes to washstand behind door and proceeds to wash himself. There is a long silence, broken only by the work of Mrs. Waddell.*]

MRS. WADDELL (*seeing he has finished his ablutions*). You kin set.

[*Charlie Holmes sits at table left and eats in silence.*]

MAME (*breaking the silence*). You got all you whant?

CHARLIE (*eating*). I got all I want.

MAME (*to Mrs. Waddell*). Charlie ain't ben eatin' rightly of late.

MRS. WADDELL (*trying to help out*). Kin I hand you anythin'?

CHARLIE. No.

MAME. Git him some of them preserves, cherry; he was always a great hand fer cherry preserves.

[*Mrs. Waddell goes to work-table upper left and gets the preserves.*]

MAME (*watching her*). Nigh the bottom. (*Seeing Mrs. Waddell reach.*) There. (*Mrs. Waddell returns and takes paraffin off top of glass.*) They're good to whet the appetite.

MRS. WADDELL (*setting them on table*). If there ain't nothin' else, Mrs. Holmes, I'll run home and care fer Tessie.

OL' CAPTAIN

MAME. I don't know how to thank you, Mrs. Waddell.
You've ben so good.

MRS. WADDELL. I've always said we must he'p one another. Some day, like as not, somebody'll have to do as much fer me.

MAME. I'm hopin' you never git down this-a-way. A body that's ust to bein' around . . . hit's harder'n one kin say.

MRS. WADDELL. I hope when my time comes the Good Lord'll take me quick. A body that's always ben on their feet . . . nothin'd carry me away quicker'n to have to take to my bed fer good.

MAME. I've wished the same, but somehow . . . my prayers ain't never ben answered . . . never.

CHARLIE (*sourly*). A lot o' good prayin'll ever do you.

MRS. WADDELL. What ye ask in faith believin', hit'll be given to you.

MAME. I've ast . . . from my heart . . . but I've always felt a stranger somehow . . . to Him up thar.

CHARLIE. You've heerd of the unpardonable sin, hain't you!

MRS. WADDELL (*reprimanding*). Charlie Holmes, that ain't no way to talk to yer wife. You don't know what you're sayin'.

CHARLIE. She knows what I mean.

MRS. WADDELL. We hain't put here to jedge one another, but to he'p . . . them as need he'p.

CHARLIE. Ain't nuthin' wrong with her.

MAME. Mrs. Waddell, hit's hard fer a man, and him a cripple, to git the . . .

CHARLIE. It's not fer the like of you to be jawin' about me lost arm.

[*There is a tense silence.*]

MAME. Charlie Holmes, I ben that left arm o' yourn goin' on fifteen year now. I done somethin'.

CHARLIE. Ye ain't done enough. There's a debt owed yet.

OL' CAPTAIN

MAME (*after a pause*). I've paid that debt.

CHARLIE (*bitterly*). Not till the day you die.

MRS. WADDELL. I never heerd such talk in all my life.
An' her he'pless.

MAME. Don't blame him, Mrs. Waddell. Hit's maybe because I've ben too selfish that my prayers warn't answered. I maybe ain't larned to ast aright.

MRS. WADDELL. You ain't ben selfish, Mrs. Holmes. You done your share, I'm thinkin'.

MAME. Maybe He don't keer what you *do* . . . how much you do or don't do. I tuk Henry to the meetin'-house once, the only time we ever went. I had him christened. Hit was preacher Johnson that spoke that day on the words "God is Love." I never fergot, an' I've ben thinkin' all these years about that. God is *Love*, an' mebbe you cain't know Him if there ain't love in yer heart.

CHARLIE (*angrily quits the table*). Ye ain't to talk about that brat in this house. Breakin' yer promise made to me years ago, that's what yer doin'. An' quotin' about religion while yer breakin' hit!

MRS. WADDELL. Charlie Holmes, quit yer anger. Be good to her while ye kin.

MAME. No, no, I was wrong. You mustn't, Mrs. Waddell. Hit's him that's right. I've ben the stranger in this house. Charlie's right, I broke my promise.

CHARLIE (*getting his hat*). You never meant to keep it, God help me!

MAME (*excitedly*). I did, Charlie, I did! It's because I'm . . . it is the fever an' somethin' breakin' in here. I never meant to. I . . . I'll never again.

CHARLIE. I'm cuttin' Ol' Captain.

MAME (*rising*). Yer . . . Charlie!

CHARLIE (*standing at the door, towers to his full height and stares wickedly at her*). You broke yer promise. I'm cuttin' Ol' Captain, and I wish every stick o' him carried into that stove burns the lies out'n yer heart.

OL' CAPTAIN

[*He takes his double-bladed chopping axe and leaves.*

MAME (*falls back as if in a faint*). God take me! Take me!

MRS. WADDELL. Whatever does he mean? (*Mame does not answer. Mrs. Waddell goes to bed.*) Are you all right, Mrs. Holmes?

MAME. Yes, I am all right. You may go now; I want to rest.

[*There is a knock at the door. The ring of Charlie's axe is heard for the first time.*

MRS. WADDELL. No, I guess we don't need no shavin' cream, nor nuthin' to-day.

VOICE. Bakin' powders, cream o' tartar, extracts? I got a fine line o' extracts, madam, vanilla, lemon, strawberry, raspberry, jamaica ginger.

MRS. WADDELL. No, I don't reckon I need none of them either, young man. I'm he'pin' a sick woman an' I don't live here and don't do no buyin'. I'm not the madam here, as you say.

VOICE. Then I got just what the madam needs, madam. I travel most in the interest of health. I got the finest line ye ever seen of tonic, bath salts, pills fer any ailment, herbs that's nature's own remedies. I'd be most pleased to show them to the sick lady.

MAME. Let the young man come in, Mrs. Waddell.

[*The peddler enters with his sample bag. He is round faced, blue-eyed; a gangling country boy.*

PEDDLER. Good evenin', ma'am. I'm travelin' most particular in the interest of health. Health is man's most important possession, ma'am, an' I go about on my mission tryin' to bring health to . . .

MAME. Fergit yer speech, young man. What ye got in that bag?

PEDDLER (*opening it awkwardly and sitting by Mame*). I got notions, ma'am, articles fer yer toilet, things fer your cookin', remedies fer all diseases . . . Air ye sick, ma'am?

OL' CAPTAIN

MAME. I've ben ailin' fer a short spell.

PEDDLER. I'm sorry, ma'am. Mebbe ye need a tawnic. This here tawnic is made o' herbs, healin' herbs right out'n God's earth, pure and healin' an' guaranteed to . . .

MAME. How old ye be?

PEDDLER. Goin' on twenty-two, ma'am. Now fer anythin' like a tawnic . . .

MAME. Where ye raised at?

PEDDLER (*mopping his brow with a blue speckled handkerchief*). I was a orphling. I was bornt down't Red Star. Ever ben thereways?

MAME. I reckon I have.

PEDDLER. 'Course I cain't recall much. But first I was a parsonage orphling. Then, you see, I was wished off fer a hired boy fer Judge Dowell down on Drake's creek. I growed up thar, an' now I'm tryin' fer to git ahead.

MAME. What ye goin' to do next?

PEDDLER. Goin' to git married. (*Mame sinks back heavily on her pillow. The sound of Charlie's axe rings again.*) So I'm doin' a little peddlin' to git started on. Got to buy a plow an' a few wittles, pans, garden tools, an' one thing an' another like folks needs when they'se new married.

MRS. WADDELL (*seeing Mame fall back as if in a faint*). Air ye all right?

MAME. Yes, don't bother with me. You can go now.

MRS. WADDELL. I hate to leave the deeshes like this, but Tessie bein' down, if you don't mind . . .

MAME. Come at supper time and wash the deeshes an' get a bite fer us.

MRS. WADDELL. I hate to leave you not feelin' so well as usual.

MAME. Go along, I got this young man to take keer o' me. (*Mrs. Waddell goes.*) You got anythin' fer pain, lad?

PEDDLER (*confidence mounting*). I sure have, ma'am.

OL' CAPTAIN

(*Reaches for bottle.*) This here yeller powder will jest simply make a dead 'un well. Doc Tannehill says he ain't never saw nothin' like it. Lemme tell ye about the formular. Here it is in plain writin'. I'll read it.

MAME. You needn't bother now. An' who mought the gal be yer marryin'?

PEDDLER. Tain't much chancet you know her. Her name's Lulu Combs. Ol' Ike Combs' gal. Yes, ye see ol' Ike, he says he'd tenent me a eighty acre plantin' patch and gimme a team o' horses, an' a turnin' plow, an' he'll give us a shack to live in. 'Course I'll have to buy me a bull-tongue plow an' one thing 'nuther-else, so that's why I'm doin' this peddlin' to get started off on.

MAME. Ye remember yer maw, boy?

PEDDLER. I cain't say fer sartin, I do, ma'am. Seems like I do sometimes; hit's like a dream that I remember. I hope it ain't a dream, ma'am, 'cause it was beautiful . . . the only beautiful thing I've ever had except the gal I'm goin' to marry. (*The sound of the axe is heard again ringing in the distance.*) You're so kind to me, ma'am. I'm sorry yer sick. Most folks won't leave me come in and they don't buy much from me, but I'm gettin' a little to git started on, an' if you could take some of these yeller powders . . .

MAME. How much is they?

PEDDLER. Jes' two bits a bottle.

MAME. Ye say them yeller powders is good fer chist pains?

PEDDLER. Cain't be beat fer chist pains, headache, year-ache, lumbago, rheutamiz, swelled-up j'int's, and bilious cawnditions.

MAME. Have ye got somethin' . . . jest a bit stronger, boy?

PEDDLER. Yes, ma'am. Here's some pain layin' tablets that's fust rate fer chist pains an' gallopin' headaches. But they's turrible strong, ma'am. I never sell 'em, without givin' full directions. Jest one or two's a full

OL' CAPTAIN

dose. More'n four is dang'rous. Doc Tannehill, he says as how ten of 'em would kill a span o' loggin' mules.

MAME. What be they wuth?

PEDDLER. Four bits a bottle.

MAME. How many bottles ye got?

PEDDLER. Le's see . . . Seven bottles, ma'am.

MAME. Gimme them seven bottles.

PEDDLER. Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate you're he'pin' me along this-a-way. The directions is on the bottle, ma'am. Jest one or two, remember, is a full dose.

MAME. How much is the seven bottles?

PEDDLER. Lemme see. That'll be, that'll be . . . seven oughts is ought, seven fives . . . that'll be three-fifty, ma'am.

MAME. Well, now, son, you look in that ol' cracked tea-cup in the seegar box there and take all the money they is in it.

PEDDLER (*pulls out drawer of dresser and finds box*). Say, miss, they's . . . lemme count. They's twenty-one dollars and eighty-five cents in this here box.

MAME. Take it, boy; take hit all.

PEDDLER. I don't understand.

MAME. Take them all. You an' the gal will be needin' it fer startin' out new married.

PEDDLER. Oh, thank ye, ma'am. Thank ye. I'll leave these here tablets here aside ye. Much obliged!

MAME. Will you hand me a cup o' water afore ye go? I'm goin' to try out yer pain layin' tablets soon's you go.

PEDDLER. Of course.

[*He goes to bucket and returns with cup of water which he places on chair by her bed.*]

MAME. Before you go . . . that dream of your mother you tol' me of. Would you tell it to a ol' sick woman who has he'p'd you?

PEDDLER. I ain't never tol' it to no one, ma'am, but sence you've ben so kind. (*Sets water at her side. Ringing of axe chopping can be heard through the speech.*)

OL' CAPTAIN

There was a great tree which seems to be so tall it reaches the white clouds as they fly across the sky. It is always spring and the air is full of spring flowers and new grass. And I dreamt about walkin' to the foot of that tree with my maw. She was beautiful, too. An' as we set under the tree she would run her fingers through my hair and let it fly in the wind. Then she would tell me that my father was like the great tree above us, tall and strong, and she would say that I must be like him. I never saw my paw to remember him, but when I see a great tree with its branches running up into the sky, I think of him, and of how strong he must have been, and of my mother who set with me under the tree and let the wind blow through my hair. I try to be strong like he must have been, and kind like I know my mother was. (*The tree Charlie cuts falls with a tremendous splitting and crash.*) That is strange. The tree that that man was cutting out there, as I come, made me think again of the tree in my dream.

MAME. My man is cuttin' wood fer the stove.

PEDDLER. Hit ain't right to cut a great tree like that be for stovewood. Well, here is your pain layin' tablets, ma'am, an' I thank you fer all this money. We kin git a soon start.

MAME. You an' her will have grand lives.

PEDDLER. Yes, ma'am.

MAME. You'll be a good man an' stand up fer ye own. You'll be strong where we was weak. You'll be like Ol' Captain! Better folks.

PEDDLER. We'll try, ma'am. Good-bye.

[*The Peddler leaves. Mame stares for a moment, and then turns for the medicine. As her hand takes the bottle, the lights blackout.*]

Curtain

MONKEY HOUSE

By

HAROLD CALLEN

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CAST

GORILLA.

JOE AGLERIO.

MARIA AGLERIO.

MIKE AND THE KID, *two laborers.*

FOREMAN.

JAKE AND SID, *two furniture movers.*

THREE MONKEY HOUSE KEEPERS.

MEMBERS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE ZOÖLOGICAL SOCIETY.

SCENE. The monkey house in a large city Zoo.

TIME. The present.

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SCENE I.

The monkey cage, which PWA workers have been busy erecting for several months, is located in the rear, and slightly to the right. Sitting outside the cage is a little Italian stone-cutter, chiseling out a corner of the base with his chisel and hammer. Several yards to the left of him work two burly blond laborers with pick and shovel. None of them works too hard. The men begin to hum. The little Italian, keeping rhythm with his hammering, gives the well known refrain of the "O Sole Mio." The quality of his voice is a low, well-modulated base.

JOE (*in comic opera manner*). O Sole Mio, da, da, da, da, daw, de . . .

MIKE (*calling to Joe*). Better put your shoulders to the hammer, Italy, here comes your foreman.

JOE (*striking a pose*). Joe Aglerio is afraid of nobody.

[*Joe's foreman enters from left. He is about the same size as Joe, also Italian.*]

FOREMAN (*going directly to Joe*). Whatsa da matta, Joe? You worka too slow. Today we putta da monkey in the cage, and you sit, and sit, and sit, always in the same place. You no make a what we say, headway.

JOE. Well, boss, you see . . .

FOREMAN. See a dis, and see a dat! (*Gesticulating.*) All I see a is that you woika too damn slow. What dey gonna do wit da gorilla when she come in today?

JOE. Dis cage, she good enough to keep gorilla now, boss.

FOREMAN. What da you tink, gorilla she gonna live in half-finished house?

KID. It's a better house than any of us live in.

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FOREMAN (*disregarding remark*). You make a da hurry up job, I tell you, and no more a da loaf.

JOE (*angered*). Say, boss, I don't like for you to talk to me data way.

FOREMAN (*in a frenzy*). Caramba, who da hell you tink you are! I show you, I showa you, I talka what way I want. (*Adding.*) And I do what I want.

JOE (*goodnaturedly*). Don't get so a angry, boss.

FOREMAN (*excitedly*). I a no angry. (*Looking madly at Joe.*) You calla me angry? Me?

JOE. I am a moocha sorry, boss, excuse it please.

FOREMAN. Now don't forget, no more a loaf.

JOE. Datsa right, boss.

FOREMAN. And no more talka dat way, you hear?

JOE. Sure a ting, boss.

[*The foreman exits to left, and as he passes the two blond laborers, who meanwhile have continued leisurely at their tasks, he speaks to them.*]

FOREMAN. Maybe Joe learna from you dis bad habit of working slow.

MIKE. So what?

KID. Yeah, so what?

FOREMAN. Well, you bad influence for Joe.

KID (*sarcastically*). Is that so?

FOREMAN (*about to leave*). Dat's a so, yes dat's a so.

MIKE. Go on, you sawed-off half pint. If you ever spoke to me the way you did to Joe, I'd wrap this around your neck.

FOREMAN. Bah!

[*He hurriedly exits left.*]

JOE (*when the foreman has gone*). Big shot! (*Confidently.*) I'm not afraid of him. I just amake believe.

KID. You can't kid us, Joe.

JOE. You see, if he come in here again; I tell him plenty.

KID (*seriously*). Yeah? Hey, here he comes, Joe.

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[The two burly laborers smile whimsically, as Joe goes on with his hammering, now in a much faster pace, not turning back to see who has entered. There enters from left a keeper in uniform. Walking in front of him is a man-sized gorilla which he has leashed to a chain. The laborers, busy in their work, do not see him until, passing by Mike and the Kid, both of them gasp at the sight of the huge, hairy animal. They do not, however, make enough of an outburst to disturb Joe at his continuous rat-tat-tat with his hammer and chisel. The keeper of the animal appears to be the type of man who has probably been born to his job, and forever after will stick to it. If possible, he should even wear a brownish, drooping mustache that always seems to be wet with the foam of beer. He should also, if possible, talk in somewhat of a nasal tone. When the keeper sees Mike and the Kid gasp at the appearance of the animal, he reassures them of its harmlessness in that know-it-all manner of his.]

KEEPER. Nothin' to be skeered of, boys.

KID. Just the same, he's no friend of mine. Take him away.

KEEPER (*with bravado*). Harmless, perfectly harmless, that's what he is. Unless he takes a sudden dislike to you, like any animal might.

(The keeper walks off with his charge to the cage. Joe has his back turned towards him, so he does not in the least realize the presence of either of them. The keeper takes out a batch of keys, and finding that the first does not fit the lock, he tries the next, and then the next, and so on. In the meantime, the large hairy animal has noticed the little Italian sitting there, and making the peculiar rat-ratta-tat-tat noise. He tries to peer over his shoulders to see what he is working with, but the little Italian turns his shoulder to one side. The animal then attempts to peer over his other shoulder. Here he succeeds better. As a matter of fact, he even likes those funny little tools

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that the Italian is playing with. He pats Joe on his right shoulder. Joe looks around the left, sees the keeper, and turns back again. The animal becomes impatient. It seems that he, too, would like to play with those tools. He pats Joe on his left shoulder; Joe turns around to the right, sees the two smiling laborers and turns back again. Evidently the gorilla's patience is at an end, for he lifts Joe up bodily and stands him on his feet. Joe turns around, let's out a loud yell, something like "Morona Maria," throws the tools high in the air, looks about him to right and to left, and finally runs left, where the two burly laborers stop him. Evidently the hairy animal has enjoyed this little scene, for he looks on with plenty of yelping, and shaking of his low powerful body. He picks up the tools, and is about to attempt working with them, when his keeper opens the cage door.)

KEEPER (*taking the tools from the gorilla*). Come on, get into that cage of yours. I've had plenty trouble opening it, now get in. (*He pushes the animal into the cage and locks the door behind him. The animal evidently is peeved, and lets out a whining, angry yelp. Then, to Joe, the keeper adds.*) Here's your tools.

JOE (*standing with the other laborers*). You bringa dem over here to me. I no go a near da animal once again.

KEEPER. Well, by heck, you're not telling me that you're skeered of that little monkey. Here, take your tools. I'll show you how harmless he is.

(*Joe looks at the keeper, transfers his gaze to the tools, and then to the powerful monkey, debating within himself whether or not it's safe to come and get his hammer and chisel. The gorilla looks at Joe with a mellow, contented expression, and with somewhat of a twinkle in his eye. Finally, Joe walks slowly over to the keeper and takes his tools. He doesn't know whether to stand near to the animal cage or return to where the two laborers are standing. However, after looking back and forth between the laborers and the mellowed animal in the cage, he seems to have*

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taken on a bit more courage and he remains standing in his place, although not too sure of himself.)

KEEPER (*standing next to the cage and calling to the gorilla*). Come here, you! (*The gorilla goes to him.*)

I could put my hand in his mouth, he's so harmless. (*Puts his hand in the gorilla's mouth.*) Nothin' at all to be skeered of, perfectly friendly — that animal is.

[*The keeper goes over to Joe and looks at him from a high altitude, making Joe appear smaller than he is.*]

KEEPER. Come on, you look like ya could put your hand in his mouth.

JOE. Heh, you joke.

KEEPER (*impatiently*). Now, don't be skeered.

[*Grabs Joe by the arm.*]

JOE (*getting excited*). Disa joke is going too far. I no like a dis business.

KEEPER (*pulling Joe over to the cage*). I tell you he's harmless; now don't be skeered.

[*The hairy animal emits a whining, angry hiss.*]

JOE (*getting out of the keeper's grasp and running to where the other laborers stand*). Caramba! The monkey, she got it two beeg arms; she no need my leetle hand.

KEEPER (*with much bravado*). Maybe one of you strong men would like trying it? (*Both laborers smile whimsically. Keeper continues his bragging.*) I'll show you, I'll put both arms in his mouth. (*He walks up to the bars. He puts his hands near the monkey, who snaps at them; and the keeper draws them back just in time.*) Damn your hide. Trying to bite, aye? Well, for that, you get no food today.

[*He exits to the left as the laborers try to hide their laughter.*]

KID (*trying to scare Joe*). Tough on you having to work right outside that monkey cage. Especially as they aren't gonna feed him today.

JOE. He looks like a nice feller, eh?

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KID. Yeah, but you can't tell what these critters are likely to do when they get hungry. Though you can take a chance and work there.

JOE (to the other laborer). What you say, Mike, I take chance?

MIKE. I don't know. I haven't had much experience with monkeys. My experience was all with men.

JOE. I take a da chance joos the same.

(Joe walks over to his former position outside the monkey cage. He seats himself on his little box, and with hammer and chisel in hand he proceeds to work. From his retreat within the cage the monkey's eyes light up as the rat-tat-tat of Joe's hammering reaches his attentive ears. Getting up on his feet, the monkey cautiously walks towards the place where Joe sits and works. The little Italian stone-cutter, however, has been keeping his eyes open for any move of the sort. As soon as the gorilla comes closer, Joe stops his chiselling, and sits looking at the monkey; ready to leave his place and run, if necessary. The monkey, seeing Joe stop, also stops, and bending his head, looks coyly at Joe. Joe grins.)

JOE (to the other laborers). See, what I tella you. Da monkey, I t'ink she lika me.

(He continues with his hammering. The monkey jumps up and down in glee. It comes closer and scrutinizes the work of the hammer and chisel. Joe has entirely forgotten that the animal is a menace, and is happy at the joy that the hairy gorilla derives from watching him work. Joe does a quick rat-tat-tat with his tools, which causes the animal to jump up and down, make his own peculiar noises, and finally to turn a somersault. Joe grins. It is indeed an eventful day when someone so much more powerful than himself should take such a keen pleasure in him.)

JOE (to the monkey). I make a for you a big, warm home to live in. Not like stinking rooms I got. *(The monkey puts his large paw through the cage, and on*

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Joe's shoulder. Just a sign of friendship, sort of!)
Hey you, you like me too much now.

(The animal takes his paw off Joe and curls up against the bars; evidently waiting for Joe to continue with his work. Joe does. The monkey looks at him in that coy way peculiar to dogs and other domesticated animals with some spark of intelligence in them. Evidently the monkey would like to play with those tools, too. For, like a little child, he slowly puts out his paw to touch the chisel, and quickly draws it in again, afraid it might burn him. Seeing nothing happen, he puts out his paw again, and lays it on the hammer. Joe understands the animal's desires.)

JOE (to the other laborers). Look, the monkey; she wanna work, too.

KID. Don't let her eat those tools.

JOE. No, no, no. She smart monkey. *(Giving animal his tools.)* Here, you work.

(The animal takes the tools and looks at them like a monkey that might have picked up the skull of a man's head out in the African jungle somewhere. Finally, he tries to sit down in the same manner that Joe sits. After a few embarrassing falls, he succeeds. But in duplicating the work of little Joe with the hammer and the chisel, he fails badly; instead of hitting the head of the chisel, he misses and hits his own paw. Whereupon he lets out a loud yelp and jumps high in the air. The tools drop at the feet of Joe. The monkey retreats to the rear of the cage, not knowing what to make of the harmful situation.)

JOE. Poor monkey, he hurta his hand. Come a to me, I feexa for you. *(Beckons to the animal with his finger. The monkey looks at Joe, not knowing whether to go to him or not. Finally, after much cajoling, the animal, like a blushing bride, goes to Joe.)* Geeva me your hand. *(The monkey extends his paw to Joe. Joe takes it in his arms and rubs it soothingly.)* There, leetle bambino, soon she stop geeving you da pain. *(The monkey*

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lays his head against Joe's outstretched arm and looks again at him in that sly, coy way peculiar to the animals, as Joe continues to soothe his paw.) Say, I got a lot work to do. *(He pushes the monkey back, and picking his tools up, proceeds to hammer.)* I got to make beautiful house for you. *(The monkey, however, doesn't like this, for he keeps bothering Joe by putting his paws over on his shoulders and his hands. Joe makes believe he's angered.)* I tella you, I got work to do. I no monkey like you, I a man, I moost work.

MIKE. And you better start, Joe. That foreman of yours is standing outside.

JOE. See a dat, she understand what I say. Listen you, monkey; dis afternoon, if dey bring you no eat, den I give you da beeg roll dat my Maria make for my lunch. *[The gorilla, again sensing the meaning of what Joe has said, jumps up and down, and does a somersault.]*

JOE. Leesten, you monkey, you like a me, yeah; we be best friends, heh? You be da muscle and I da brain. *(He grins proudly.)* And now I gonna build for you one grand palace. *(With hammer in hand, he begins to chisel.)* I do now the best stone cutting I know how. *(The monkey, sensing the intense earnestness of Joe, seats himself in the pose of "The Thinker" and listens.)* I make sooch fine building, even the president, he be glad to live here. I cut da rock, like da sculpture in ancient Italy.

[As Joe speaks, and the gorilla sits listening to him, the stage darkens.]

KID. Don't work too fast, Joe. The sooner we get done the quicker we get layed off.

Blackout.

SCENE 2.

More than two months have passed.

The stage lights up, and we find ourselves in the small

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room occupied by Joe Aglerio and his wife, Maria. The room is barren except for a table placed in the center, several chairs that are standing on their last legs, and a few other odds and ends that the theatre might scrape together. The little Italian stone cutter is sitting at the table in exactly the same pose that we left the monkey in the last scene. In another corner of the room sits his wife. She is a big woman, almost three times the area of Joe. She, too, sits in the pose of "The Thinker." However, their expressions are that of bewilderment and suspension of all brain activity. Finally Mrs. Aglerio scratches her head and gets up.

MARIA (*serving her husband an ultimatum*). Well, Meester Joe Aglerio, when you gonna get it another job? Uh?

JOE (*meekly*). But where I gonna get it da job?

MARIA (*showing signs of anger*). Ah, you say a da same thing now for two months.

JOE. But what can I do, Maria? Everyone say I'm too leetle for labor work, and stone cutting work is all done.

MARIA (*getting excited*). Caramba, if I was a man, I no wait two months without getting no work. (*Waving her hands over her head.*) I get it or I break it somebody's head. Bah, but what is da good talking, I am not a man.

JOE. Ah, Maria, if I was not so leetle, if I was beeg, and strong, with a da muscles like da monkey in her cage, den Maria, I teacha dem not to make fool of me when I say I could do even da hard work. But what is da good, I am not beeg, I am small like cockroach.

MARIA (*talking furiously*). Every day you talka da monkey; how beeg and strong and how mooch she like a you. How she kiss you and how she licka you. Why dey not fire da monkey, and keepa you, instead?

JOE. Da monkey, she is a dumb animal. Where she gonna eat? Where she gonna leeve?

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MARIA. Always you worry for da poor leetle monkey.
You no worry for me, poor leetle me.

JOE. No, no, no, dat is not true. I love a you more, and I worry for you more, Maria. But da monkey, I like, I understand her. She is so strong, and yet she in a cage. I do sooch fine stone cutting, but joost like da monkey, I live in a cage too.

MARIA. Always you tella me the monkey she like a you. But the job? She no like a you. Goomby job, goomby everything. Viva la monkey. Why you no go and leeve with her?

JOE. Heh, Maria, you joke, nobody like for to look at me. Dey like to look at the great, beeg gorill' in her cage. (*Proudly.*) And who build a da cage? Who make sooch monkey palace? Who worka da hard cutting and cutting away da rock? Who, Maria? Me, Meester Joe Aglerio. See, Maria, dat's a why she like a me; dat's a why she kiss a me.

MARIA. Sure, you plenty smart to make beautiful monkey house. But where we got to live? Here? Phewee!

[There is heard a heavy knock on the door. The Aglerios look at each other silently. The knock comes again, this time louder.]

JOE (*still under the spell of his last speech, yells out*).
Come in!

[The door opens, and two men enter. They look like furniture movers, and they are furniture movers.]

FURNITURE MOVER. Well, let's get it over with. You people are being evicted. O.K., Jake, take the table.

[Jake is about to pick the table up, but Maria stops him.]

MARIA. Say, you leave a da furniture alone. I calla da cop.

JAKE. D'ya get dat? She's gonna call the cops. Dat's hot, all right. (*He tries pushing her aside, but it's plain to see that she is too big for him.*) Listen, lady. Dis

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ain't gonna do you no good. We got orders, with the cop's permission to put you out. We're gonna give you a pent-house apartment on the sidewalk.

[Maria is still obstinate.]

MARIA. I no care what you say, dis is my furniture and my apartment.

JOE. Dats a right. Now you two get out of here, quick.

[Little Joe makes something of a comic of himself, ordering men so much bigger than himself out of the house. Maria looks at her husband proudly.]

JAKE. Take that thing away, lady, before I step on it.

FURNITURE MOVER. Shh, cut it out, Jake. Listen, lady, we don't like to do this, but if we don't somebody else will. What's the use kidding yourself? You know as well as I do that you don't pay rent for two months you're gonna be put out. *(Maria looks at the table resignedly)*. Go ahead, Jake, she didn't understand, that's all.

[Jake lifts the table on his head and walks out with it, and the other follows him with two chairs. They exit.]

JOE *(angrily)*. What for you let a dem crooks take out our furniture? Where we gonna leeve if we be put out on da street, uh?

MARIA. But we no pay da rent for two months.

JOE. I no care. We leeve here, and we gonna stay here. You watcha me.

[Joe is still sitting in his chair. Presently the two furniture movers return. They look around for more heavy furniture to remove, and Jake walks over to where Joe is sitting.]

JAKE. Sorry to disturb you, mister, but that chair belongs with the table out on the sidewalk.

JOE. What you say?

JAKE *(looking him over)*. I said, get up off that chair.

JOE *(looking straight ahead)*. And I no answer you.

JAKE *(to the other furniture mover, who by now has put*

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two other chairs together, and is about to carry them out). The little guy won't budge.

[He winks to his partner.]

FURNITURE MOVER. Now it's him putting up the kick, uh? O.K., let's go. *(He puts down the two chairs.)* Mister, you're going to be carried down.

[He winks back to Jake. Jake gets in back of the chair, and the other one in front of it. As Jake says "Let's go," they lift the chair up, Joe and all, and proceed to carry him off. But they had not reckoned on Maria. On seeing what is happening, she immediately begins kicking Jake in the ankles. At each separate kick, Jake lets out a separate groan.]

MARIA *(as she kicks him)*. You leave a my hoosband alone, I tell you I no stand for sooch monkey business.

JAKE *(as he receives the kicks)*. Ouch, lady, cut it out. Ouch, my feet. Owwwwwww!

[As they reach the door, Jake, in final agony at being kicked in the shins so much, drops his end of the chair, and poor little Joe comes tumbling out. In the meantime, the other furniture mover has whisked the chair out of the room. Joe looks about him, and with much anger gathers himself up.]

JOE. You t'nk you smart, uh? Everybody dey t'ink a dey smart. I show you, I show a everybody what I do. *(Joe angrily goes to a corner of the room, and takes up his old tool bag, and holding that in one hand, with the other he takes Maria by the arm.)* You come with me, Maria.

MARIA. Where a we go, Joe?

JOE. Never you mind. Joost come a with me. *(Turning to Jake.)* Goomby, you! Where I go now you no can t'row me out. I would just like a to see you try.

[Joe and Maria exit as the stage darkens on the end of scene 2.]

Blackout.

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SCENE 3.

The monkey house. Immediately after. Within the cage, and curled up against the bars, is our friend the gorilla. Looking in from the outside are the two burly laborers whom we met in the first scene. The job of erecting the monkey house is finished, and apparently both men have been laid off. Certainly they look it. The Kid starts talking to the monkey.

KID. Sure, you hairy baboon, make yourself comfortable in the house we built.

MIKE. What's eatin' you, kid?

KID. Aw, hell. We work ourselves to the bone building this shebang and then they put a gorilla in; and we got to live in a stinking shanty over on the lots.

MIKE. Won't do you any good taking it out on the gorilla.

KID (*to the monkey*). You must be laughing up your sleeve; that's what you're doing. Taking things soft: eatin' three squares a day; no worries about a job. Damn your hairy hide! I'll change places with you. I'm human; I got brains; I even built this place. Well, come on; change places; (*Threateningly.*) change places.

[*Mike puts his arm about the Kid's shoulder.*]

MIKE. Come on, Kid, this place is got you, let's get going.

KID. Goin', hell. The only place I'm going is in that cage.

MIKE. Listen, Kid, keep this up and you'll be in a cage . . . in the bughouse.

KID. It's all that damned gorilla's fault.

MIKE (*as he walks the Kid out*). What the hell does the gorilla know?

KID. Well, who's fault is it?

MIKE. It's not the gorilla.

[*As they both exit to the left, the monkey scratches its*

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head. *Maria and Joe enter from the right. As the gorilla sees his old friends, he lets out loud, joyous yelps; and starts jumping up and down. Joe's eyes light up, and he runs to the cage. It's as if father and son hadn't seen each other for several years. He halts outside the cage.*

JOE. I no can pay the rent in my house, so we come to your house. Heh, Maria?

MARIA. Dat's a right.

JOE. Ah, you never yet meet a my Maria? You like a her. *(The gorilla does a somersault.)* Wait, we come in. *(Joe proceeds to dig into his tool bag, and out comes the hammer and chisel. Going to the lock on the cage he begins to chisel it open. Within a half minute the lock gives way, and the cage door is opened.)* Come, Maria, I help you in.

MARIA *(somehow not certain of herself)*. Joe, but how can we live in here?

JOE. Ah, Maria, always you joke. We can not live in streets. And besides, the monkey she like us. Heh, monkey? *(The gorilla jumps up and down. It is not an easy matter for our robust Maria to be pushed into the cage by little Joe, but after a little extra muscle pressure he manages to do so. Once she's in, he quickly follows her, tools and all, and closes the door behind him. They embrace — the gorilla and Joe — and are about to go into a waltz, when Joe halts.)* Dis a my wife, Maria. You gotta be good friend with her. *(The gorilla proceeds to embrace her as he did Joe. Joe separates them and grins.)* You smart monkey, you want to be too good a friend with Maria. She nice and soft, heh?

[The gorilla hides its face in shame, like a naughty child. Maria and Joe laugh at how adept the animal is at mimicking humans.]

MARIA *(still doubtful)*. You sure you like to have us leev here with you?

JOE. Sure she like. *(The gorilla does a somersault.)*

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Joe shakes his head.) The monkey, she is so strong! Ah, Maria, if I was so strong, nobody could put me out of my house. Nobody put me in street for not have money to pay rent.

[A lady enters from the right, one of the charity philanthropist type. Her nose is perched high, and so is her bosom. Upon seeing the happy family within the cage, she emits a shrill sound.]

LADY. You mustn't stay in there; it's dangerous.

JOE. Dat's a all right. I builda this house, and the monkey she like a me, because she know who build it.

LADY (*indignant*). But that cage is only for the gorilla.

MARIA (*in hushed voice*). Maybe the lady, she right.

JOE. Dat's a all right, lady. The monkey, she like us, she want us to stay.

LADY. Preposterous! As a member of the Zoölogical Society, I object to your remaining in there.

JOE. Well, I build a dis house, so I got it da right to stay here.

LADY. I shall call the keeper immediately. I shall have the members of the Society here. This is terrible.

JOE. Every place I move dey trow me out. I show you I let you trow me out no more. I fight, and the monkey she fight with me.

LADY (*stunned*). Oh, my God, I'll call the keeper.

[And as if she feared contamination, she sails out in a flurry of rage and anger.]

MARIA. She call the keeper, Joe. What we do now?

JOE (*resolutely*). We stay here.

MARIA. Maybe the monkey, she is sick? Better we go out, Joe.

JOE. Dat's foolishness. Sooch a strong monkey, and you say she sick. I go and feel her temperature, we see.

[He takes a few steps forward, but Maria holds him back.]

MARIA. You no go near him, I tella you. (*Joe stops in his tracks; the gorilla sits on its haunches; and both*

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contemplate each other.) See, she so sick, she no can stand up. Better we go out.

JOE. But if the monkey is sick, den I moost stay here with her. Somebody is got to take care of her. (*The monkey senses the meaning of this, and springs up and down, and then poses his powerful body.*) Who a say she sick? Look a dat strong chest. (*Going towards the gorilla.*) Soocha nonsense.

[*At this point the lady returns, and with her is a keeper. It is the same keeper that we had encountered in the first scene. Under his arm he carries a rifle.*]

KEEPER. Oh, it's that little Italian stone cutter once again, aye. And he's moved in with his wife. (*Sarcastically.*) How do you like your new home?

JOE. All right. We no kick.

MARIA. Joe, ask when we eat.

KEEPER. You'll eat, you will. Now get out of there, both of you.

LADY. They just won't budge from there.

KEEPER. Well, then I'll go in, and get them to budge. (*He moves towards the cage door. The gorilla emits a loud, gruff, angry howl, and the keeper backs away.*) Well, then, see how you like this! [*He lifts up his rifle and aims.*]

LADY. Oh, don't you dare shoot the gorilla; he's a rare specimen and very expensive.

KEEPER. But what else is there to do, madam?

LADY (*slightly befuddled*). Why? Yes, yes, shoot . . . by all means . . . shoot the man. (*Slight pause.*) No, no, what am I talking about? Don't shoot the man.

MARIA. Joe, maybe we go out, heh?

JOE. But what'sa da use, Maria?

LADY (*enraged*). Very well! This has gone far enough! I'll get more members of the Society, and more keepers; we'll get them out. In the meantime, do your best.

KEEPER. Yes, ma'am. (*Lady exits. With a bit of bra-*

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vado the keeper lifts his rifle and again tries going to the cage door.) Will you come out, or won'tcha? (All three within the cage remain staringly mute. Keeper pushes the cage door open and levels his rifle.) That damn gorilla doesn't like me, anyway. This is good excuse for taking a pot shot at him.

[At this point the gorilla makes a flying tackle for the keeper. The keeper lets fly his rifle high in the air, and in a jiffy is himself out to the right. Joe and Maria look with pride upon the gorilla, their powerful protector. Enter from left the two burly laborers again. They argue disconsolately.

MIKE. Come on, Kid, forget about the monkey, will ya?

KID. Well, ain't he livin' off my sweat?

MIKE. Come on home, Kid.

KID. No, I ain't going back to that stinking shanty.

MIKE. You're not expecting to live with the gorilla, are you?

[The Kid shakes his head sullenly. By now they have come before the monkey cage, and upon seeing their former fellow worker and his wife inside, their eyes literally bulge.

MIKE. Joe!

KID. Ain't that something?

JOE. My friends! Caramba, come in.

[The Kid is about to enter the cage.

MIKE (holding him). Wait, Kid. How about the gorilla? Is he safe?

KID. Hell, he's the only one around here that is safe.

JOE. Sure, the monkey she let nobody kick us out.

KID. And me thinking it was all the gorilla's fault.

[Mike and the Kid enter the cage.

JOE. No, no, no. (Grinning.) You got more to be afraid of my wife, Maria.

KID. Well, I'll be . . . and the wife besides!

JOE. Sure, they kick us out from other house, so we move in here.

KID. Thet was my idea, too.

MONKEY HOUSE

JOE. Sure, we build a dis house, why it not belong to us?

MIKE. You sure got the right idea there.

JOE. At first my Maria, she was afraid to come in.

MARIA. Sure, dat monkey, she so beeg. I no like to get into fight with her.

JOE. You not sooch bad fighter yourself, Maria. I know.

[Enter from right the Keeper and the Lady, and close upon their heels two new keepers and additional members of the Zoölogical Society, both male and female.]

LADY *(upon seeing Mike and the Kid within the cage)*.

Oh, they're taking in more of their rowdies. Oh, this is awful.

OTHERS. Gracious!

Dear me!

It's deplorable!

Something must be done!

LADY. Keepers! Get them out of there! This is unlawful! You may use your rifles if necessary.

KID. Who are the stuffed shirts?

LADY. Oh, I knew they were reds. I just knew it.

FROM WITHIN THE CAGE. Uh? Uh? Uh?

KID. Come on, let's give them the works.

[He goes for the cage door. The two keepers level their rifles.]

KEEPER. All right, you mugs, get out of there.

KID. What?

KEEPER. You heard me. Clear out of there.

ANOTHER KEEPER. Maybe you'd like to hear this rifle speak?

[Inside the cage they look hopelessly at one another. Evidently the jig is up.]

A GENTLEMAN. Really now, boys, be reasonable. Let's not create a disturbance.

MIKE. They got the rifles, Kid.

KID. Well, Joe, it looks like we'll have to find new homes.



ALPHONSE BATE

MONKEY HOUSE

JOE. What you mean? Why should we let them kick us out? Why we don't kick them out?

MIKE. They have the rifles, and those things don't listen to arguments.

KID (*disparagingly*). Muscle don't mean a thing any more. Well, gorilla, you ain't so strong after all.

[*They all look at the gorilla. He seems, however, to sense what is troubling his friends. He whines. Looks shrewdly at the spectators outside the cage. Looks back and forth. Smells the air. Suddenly he leaps toward the cage door and opens it. The spectators quickly fall back, all except the Lady. Lightning like, the gorilla picks up the rifle that the keeper had previously let fall there. The Lady dashes over and takes the rifle by the butt end. A tug-o'-war begins, with the guard helping the Lady, and the gorilla on the other side of the rifle. When the other guards, gentlemen, and ladies come to the aid of the Lady, Joe, Maria and the two laborers come to the aid of the gorilla. The tug-o'-war is now complete, with half the contestants inside the cage and the other half outside; and all yelling at the top of their voices. Finally the gorilla and workers pull themselves to victory, drawing the Lady inside the cage with them. The other guards, ladies, and gentlemen, fall back, sprawled over the floor. The gorilla takes the rifle and fires a volley into the air. The other guards, ladies, and gentlemen quickly pick themselves up and scramble out of the monkey house.*]

JOE. Viva la monkey!

KID. Hot dawg!

LADY (*only one of her kind remaining now in the cage*). This is barbarous.

KID. Aw, button up your lip.

JOE. Come on, everybody. (*He leads them all out of the cage. Lady tries to follow.*) Say, you staya in there. (*Frightened, the lady falls back. Joe shuts the cage door against her. To the gorilla.*) Everytime she keepa you in the cage, eh? (*The gorilla whines assent-*

MONKEY HOUSE

ingly.) Now you gonna keep her in da cage. (Gorilla looks dumbly at Joe. Joe takes rifle from gorilla and, walking like a soldier, keeps guard over the monkey cage. Showing gorilla.) Like this! (He hands the rifle back to the gorilla. Gorilla mimics the way Joe kept guard.) Dat's a da way.

KID (*picking up cap that fell from guard's head and placing it on gorilla's head*). Now you're a real monkey house guard.

JOE. Come, everybody.

[As he leads them toward door.]

KID. Where we goin'?

JOE (*pointing to Lady in cage*). Maybe we go to her house!

[The workers all exit laughing. The gorilla comically walks back and forth, guarding the lady inside the cage, as she angrily grasps the bars.]

Curtain

SWEET "16"

By

ARLEEN THYSON

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CAST

MADGE TEMPLE.

MR. W. P. D. CARLTON, JR., *director*.

LLOYD, *the make-up man*.

JOE, *the stage manager*.

SUE, *promptress of "Tenth and Biddle."*

GWENDOLYN MONTCRIEFF, *author of "Dinner for Five."*

Cast of "Dinner for Five":

(Rodney Van Smythe) HUGH BRADLEY.

(Euphemia Van Smythe) BABS WARREN.

(Leonard Pannelcliff) GEORGE TRENT.

(Lydia Pannelcliff) JANET CRANDON.

(Lord Worthington-Quizzleby) .. RICHARD KIRCHER.

Cast of "Tenth and Biddle":

(Mamie O'Calahan) ADA NEWMARK.

(Guiseppe Veroni) BILL FERRIS.

(Mrs. MacGregor) SHIRLEY MELMAN.

(Patrick Murphy) TOM GALLAGHER.

Cast of "Southern Accent":

(Charlotte Lou) KAY SHERWOOD.

(Colonel Neville) RALPH GALT.

(Captain Fuller) JERRY HODGE, *author of*
"Tenth and Biddle."

SCENE. The "green room" of the new theater in Brown Hall, Washington University.

TIME. 8:45 P. M., English "16" night, the night of the annual one-act play tournament.

SWEET "16"

The action takes place in the "green room" below stage in the theater in Brown Hall. The men's and women's dressing rooms are on either side. A plain table with make-up equipment stands at the left, center. A fairly large mirror hangs on the rear wall at the right. There is also a door on either side of the rear wall. Another table stands downstage, farther left than the first. On it are a market basket, a hand organ, several swords, and a policeman's cap and club. There are three chairs: one at the left rear, one next to the make-up table, and one at the right front.

When the curtain rises "Dinner for Five" is in progress upstairs. Lloyd, a quiet, friendly man in his early thirties, is making-up Ralph, who is seated in the make-up chair. Ralph is dressed as a Southern Colonel in Civil War times. Stoop, a large, awkward boy, is not yet made-up and is standing behind the table smearing his face with cold cream. He is wearing the uniform of a Confederate soldier. Kay and Bud, ready to go on, are sitting on the edge of the prop table. Kay wears the costume of a Southern Civil War belle. Her hair is in long curls, worn down on one shoulder. She is knitting. Bud's face is blacked and he has on a butler's uniform of the period. Ada, wearing a checked gingham dress which is almost entirely covered by a rather soiled apron, and Bill, who is dressed like a typical Italian organ-grinder, are downstage at the right.

ADA (to Bill). Ready? (She changes to a rich brogue.)

I'm tellin' ye final, Guiseppi Veroni, ye've got to choose between me and the monk'!

BILL. Now, Mamie, be reezonable.

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ADA. Oh, no, Bill, don't come in so quickly. That's a dramatic moment, see. A bitter struggle is taking place within you.

LLOYD (*applying mascara to Ralph's eyes*). Look up, please.

BILL (*resignedly*). O.K., try it again.

BUD. You'd better try it several times, fellow. You'll have to be mighty good to beat us.

LLOYD (*to Ralph*). Down.

[*Lloyd's directions to the person on whom he is working should continue to be inserted in the dialogue in accordance with Lloyd's actions.*]

KAY. We've just got to win for Ken.

LLOYD. I imagine the decision will go to either "Tenth and Biddle" or "Southern Accent."

ADA. Don't you think Gwendolyn has a chance?

KAY. She may have. Two of the judges look very sophisticated.

BILL. Then I and the monk' ought to go over big.

RALPH. The trouble with Gwen's play is that there's no action.

BUD. Yeah, rigor mortis sets in after the first three lines.

BILL. Well, maybe it'll get the prize for the most beautiful still of the month.

STROOP (*jumping up and down and waving his arms wildly*). Ada! Kay! Help! Cold cream in my eyes! Oooooo!

[*The girls rush to his rescue.*]

BILL. Jerry's awfully late. "Dinner for Five" must be half over, and "Southern Accent" ought to go on in about twenty minutes.

BUD. Yeah, I sure wish he'd come.

ADA. You know, even though I'm in Jerry's play, I'd like to see Ken get the prize.

BILL. Traitor.

ADA. Ken's one of the swellest fellows in school.

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BILL. Sure he is, Ada. I'm for him, too.

KAY. I wish Ken and Madge would get here. And Jerry . . .

ADA. Oh, Madge went home this afternoon. Ken has to go over to East St. Louis to get her.

KAY. This contest means so much to both of them. They wouldn't be late if something hadn't happened.

BUD. Oh, they'll be here soon. Jerry's the fellow I'm worrying about.

RALPH. Stoop's the fellow I'm worrying about. He still doesn't know his lines.

STOOP. It's just that one line. I never can remember: "Colonel Neville, have no fear. I will not return without . . . I will not return without . . ." Oh, golly! *[All ignore him.]*

BILL. It looks like . . . *(He pauses, a little embarrassed.)* Well, Jerry's starring in a rival play and if he fails to show up . . . Ken's play's supposed to go on in a few minutes. . . .

KAY *(surprised and indignant)*. Bill, how can you even suggest that Jerry would purposely be late! Why, Ken and Jerry have been friends all their lives. Do you think they'd let a little thing like a play come between them?

ADA. Well, no, darling, not a little thing like a play. But a little thing like Madge Temple . . .

RALPH. Jerry was pretty sore about Ken's having a date with Madge tonight.

BILL. Yes, Kay. Last year it was moonlight and roses with Madge and Jerry, wasn't it? Didn't Ken sort of muzzle in?

KAY *(angrily)*. And they say women gossip!

BUD *(seizing a sword)*. Who dares to slander the name of the fair Madge Temple dies like a dog!

[Sue Rellim enters from the right rear. She is small and vivacious. She moves and speaks quickly.]

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SUE. Hello, hello, hello.

KAY, BUD, BILL, AND STOOP (*together*).

Hello, Sue.

Greetings.

Hi, Sue!

Good evening.

SUE (*to Ada*). Mamie, my dear, tell me quickly that you've brought your script.

ADA. Why, no, I haven't.

SUE. Oh, Lord. And neither have I. I hope I haven't lost the darned thing!

BUD. A fine promptress!

SUE. Oh, Bill, will you be sweet and drive me home to get it?

BILL (*gallantly*). Anything for you, my love.

RALPH. Well, you'd better step on it.

SUE. Oh, we have loads of time. We don't go on for about fifty minutes. Come, Bill, we must away!

[*She and Bill start for the door.*]

ADA. Excuse the suggestion, but . . . uh . . . don't forget that you are in a play tonight. Do come back sometime.

SUE. Don't worry, Ada. I'll bring him back unharmed. In fact we've practically returned.

[*They exit.*]

BUD (*drily*). I was wondering who'd forget the script. Oh, well. Dance, Kay?

[*He and Kay dance, humming whatever song is most popular at the time the play is produced.*]

STOOP (*rehearsing*). "Colonel, I will not return without . . . without . . ." What won't I return without?

BUD (*stopping the dance*). Without Kay! Good lord, stupid, she's eloping with the Yankee dog! You're going to save her. But, of course, we can't expect you to remember that. It's just the plot of the play.

[*He and Kay resume the dance.*]

LLOYD (*to Ralph, having finished his make-up*). There

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you are. (*Then, to Stoop, who is by now a shining sea of cold cream.*) All right, come on.

[*Ralph goes back to the mirror to look at the mustache and goatee Lloyd has put on him, and Stoop sits down in the make-up chair. Madge Temple enters from the left rear. She is an attractive girl with brown hair and brown eyes. She is very excited.*]

KAY (*stopping the dance again*). Why, Madge! We've been wondering where . . .

MADGE. Is Jerry here?

KAY. Madge, what's wrong?

MADGE. Ken's in jail.

RALPH. What?

STOOP. In jail? My goodness, has he forgotten about his play?

MADGE. We were arrested for speeding in East St. Louis. We were late. The kangaroo court fined us fifty dollars. Of course, we didn't have it; so they put poor Ken in jail. Oh, of all the nights for this to happen!

KAY. Poor Ken!

MADGE. Our only hope is the fifty dollar prize. Oh, you've just got to put "Southern Accent" over. I know Jerry will try harder than ever. He'd do anything to get Ken out of a jam. Where is he? Upstairs?

ADA. Jerry hasn't come yet.

MADGE (*alarmed*). Hasn't come! Oh, he *must* be here.

Ada, don't joke; I'm not in a laughing mood.

ADA. I'm not joking, Madge. We're all getting worried.

MADGE. Good heavens!

RALPH. Wait till W.P.D.C., Jr. hears about it.

[*Mr. W.P.D. Carlton, Jr. enters from the left rear. He is of medium height and walks with rather short steps. He has brown hair and wears brown shell-rimmed glasses. He has a genial grin.*]

MR. CARLTON. Did someone call me? (*No one answers; so Mr. Carlton just grins.*) Is everybody ready?

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You Southerners go on in a few minutes. Hello, Madge. Where's Ken? I never like to start a play until the author is here, you know.

MADGE. Ken's in jail, Mr. Carlton. We were arrested for speeding.

MR. CARLTON. In jail? Doesn't he know any better than to get arrested on English 16 night? Madge, you should take better care of him than that!

MADGE. I know, Mr. Carlton. I do feel as if it's my fault, because I was late.

MR. CARLTON. Well, shame on you. Can't you have him bailed out or something?

MADGE. He doesn't want his father to find out. The fine is fifty dollars; so if "Southern Accent" wins . . .

MR. CARLTON (*laughing*). Well, that's an incentive to the cast. They can be good Samaritans and get the erring playwright out of the penitentiary. (*To Stoop.*) Lieutenant Bakewell, come in more quickly when Charlotte Lou calls you, and try not to stumble over the rug. And Captain Fuller, (*He looks around for Jerry.*) . . . where's the Captain?

[*Silence for a moment.*]

BUD. Jerry hasn't arrived yet, Mr. Carlton.

MR. CARLTON. Is he in jail, too? What's the matter with these authors tonight? Here, Colonel Neville, go out and call the Phi Delta house. (*He fishes through all of his pockets.*) Oh, I haven't got a nickel. Has anybody got a . . .

RALPH (*with resignation*). I've got one.

MR. CARLTON. Hurry, now. And tell him to take a 'plane and get over here right away this minute. (*Ralph exits hurriedly.*) Let's see, now. It takes Jerry fairly long to get ready. Those boots . . . Well, if he isn't here in ten minutes, "Tenth and Biddle" will have to go on second.

BUD (*in a low voice to Kay*). God, I hope Bill and Sue get back in time!

SWEET "16"

MR. CARLTON. I don't like to change the program. The two comedies shouldn't be together. Well, we'll see. Are all the "Tenth and Biddlers" ready?

ADA. Tom and Shirley are up watching the play. I'll get them.

[She goes out.]

KAY. How is "Dinner for Five" going?

MR. CARLTON. Oh, fine. The high spot of the play came when Van Smythe looked very definitely at Pannelcliff and said to his wife, "Euphemia, darling, serve the crab."

STOOP. "Colonel Neville, have no fear. I will not come back . . ."

BUD. Good.

STOOP. I mean "I will not return without . . . (*Kay indicates herself.*) without Kay!"

[Triumphantly.]

BUD. Her name happens to be Charlotte Lou in the play. Good Lord, Stoop, don't call her Kay.

KAY. Stoop is a born actor. He has drama in his blood.

BUD. Yes, but he's anaemic.

[Mr. Carlton directs Lloyd in Stoop's make-up.]

MADGE. I do hope Ralph reaches Jerry. We've got to get Ken out.

BUD. Why don't you 'phone his father?

MADGE. Oh, no! Ken's folks mustn't find out. You know how Mr. Rainer is, Bud. He said the next time Ken was arrested he'd take his car away from him. (*Forcing a laugh.*) And where would I be without Ken's car?

STOOP. You can borrow my bicycle any time, Madge.

RALPH (*returning*). He's not there.

MR. CARLTON. Did you try his home? It's just possible he might be there.

RALPH. I tried that. I called a couple of the other fraternities, too, but nobody knows where he is.

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MADGE. What can have happened to him? Oh, poor Ken!

KAY. Now, there's no need to get yourself all worked up, Madge. Come on, let's go up and watch the play.

MADGE (*sighing*). All right.

[*They exit.*]

MR. CARLTON. Well, Jerry's play will have to go on next, then.

[*Tom and Shirley enter from the right rear. Shirley, who has her make-up on, wears a calico dress and apron. Tom, not yet made up, wears a policeman's uniform.*]

SHIRLEY. What's all this about Jerry and Ken?

MR. CARLTON. They just aren't here, that's all. You "Tenth and Bidders" will have to go on next; so hurry up now. Lloyd, you can finish the lieutenant later. You'll have to do Pat now. And powder Mrs. Macgregor's hair. (*Tom sits down in the make-up chair, and Shirley picks up a switch from the table and goes back to the mirror to fix her hair.*) One, two (*Pointing to Tom and Shirley.*) Ada, three, . . . and where's Bill Ferris?

[*Dead silence.*]

SHIRLEY (*after a moment*). He was down here before, Mr. Carlton. He's all made up.

RALPH. Uh . . . he just went out for a minute. He'll be right back.

STOOP. He and Sue went out to look at the stars.

(*Ralph and Bud glare at him.*) Er . . . I mean . . .

he went out to . . . well, he . . . anyway, I know he'll be right back. Oh, yes, indeed, he'll be right back.

MR. CARLTON. Well, he'd better be. I'll have to go up now and tell Joe and Helen about the change in the program. Let me know when Jerry gets here.

[*He exits.*]

RALPH (*to Stoop*). You're *very* bright. All W.P.D.C. needs to finish him is to find out that Bill and Sue aren't here, either.

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SHIRLEY. Where are they, for heaven's sake?

BUD. Oh, the darned fools went out to Sue's to get the script which she helpfully forgot. They should be back by now. I wonder if we ought to call Sue's to see if they're still there.

RALPH. Well, I haven't any more nickels.

BUD. I'll do it.

[He goes out.]

STOOP (*approaches Ralph*). Colonel, have no fear. Do you know what I won't return without?

RALPH. I know what I wish you'd return without. Yourself, sweetheart; just go out and concentrate on losing yourself. With all of these people missing tonight, why couldn't one of them be you?

[The cast of "Dinner for Five" troops in, all talking at once. Babs and Janet are in evening dresses; Hugh, George, and Richard in tuxedos. Richard is supposedly elderly; his hair and mustaches are white. Babs, whose shoes are too small, is limping painfully.]

GEORGE (*making a wry face*). Every time I have to eat food in a play it's the same darned thing. String beans! Ugh, how I hate 'em!

JANET. George, why in heaven's name did you whisper to me like that? He kept saying, "Are these beans spoiled?" I know the first ten rows could hear him!

GEORGE. Well, they tasted terrible. I could hardly swallow them. Ugh!

JOE (*sticking his head in at the left rear door*). Will some of you fellows give me a hand with the set?

RALPH, STOOP, AND GEORGE (*together*).

Sure, Joe.

Sure, be glad to.

O.K.

[They exit. Tom, whom Lloyd has just finished, goes with them. Shirley sits down in the make-up chair and Lloyd begins powdering her hair. Babs has flopped in the

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chair downstage and has taken off her shoes. Hugh is removing his make-up with cold cream.

SHIRLEY. Not too much, Lloyd.

RICHARD (*petulantly*). Lloyd, get me out of these mustaches. They itch like fury.

LLOYD. Just pull them off.

[Richard goes back to the mirror, shoves Hugh aside, and attacks his mustaches.]

BABS. My feet will never be the same.

HUGH. Why do you wear shoes that are too small?

BABS. Because they match my dress, silly.

SHIRLEY. Did you get Sue?

BUD. No, no one answered.

SHIRLEY. Oh, heavens, what are we going to do?

LLOYD. You'd better think quickly.

BUD. Maybe Tom can take a dual rôle.

MR. CARLTON (*rushing in*). Everybody upstairs! We're all ready. A couple of the props are missing, but you'll have to do the best you can. Shirley, don't expect to find the knife in the basket, because it won't be there. Apparently one of the prop committee swallowed it. Have any of the lost souls returned? Where's Bill?

SHIRLEY. He isn't here, Mr. Carlton.

MR. CARLTON. Isn't here! (*Pause.*) Well, good heavens, where is he?

BUD (*going out hurriedly*). I'll see if I can find him.

[Tom and Ada come in.]

ADA. Where's my shawl?

[She rushes into the dressing room to get it.]

MR. CARLTON (*inspecting Shirley's make-up*). Put a dot of red in the corner of each eye, Lloyd. She looks too washed out.

[Lloyd does so.]

TOM (*rummaging among the props*). Has anyone seen my club?

[He puts his cap on and continues his search.]

BUD (*reëntering with Bill and Sue*). Here they are!

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MR. CARLTON (*very sternly to Bill*). Get your organ and get upstairs. Oh, look at your make-up! It's all streaked! Fix him, Lloyd.

[*Lloyd pushes Shirley out of the make-up chair and shoves Bill into it. The entire cast rushes madly about gathering their props. Shirley takes the market basket, Tom finally finds his club, and Bill gets the hand-organ as soon as Lloyd has retouched his make-up. The cast and Mr. Carlton exit, all talking at once, muttering lines and directions to each other.*]

BABS. Well! God bless them!

LLOYD (*heaving a sigh*). Well, I guess everyone's done now except Jerry. Oh, no, I didn't finish that Stoop man. Where is he?

[*Gwendolyn Montcrieff enters from the left rear. She is a tall, willowy, sophisticated blonde. She drops her "r's."*]

GWENDOLYN (*grabbing Hugh and Richard and dragging them upstage*). Oh, my dears, you were just too wonderful! Oh, I could just kiss every one of you! (*The boys struggle to free themselves from her grasp.*) I think we have a *marvelous* chance. Lord Worthington-Quizzleby, you were just too cute! And Pannelcliff was marvelous! (*She looks around for George.*) Oh, where is Pannelcliff? You were sweet, too, Babs darling, and Janet . . . (*She nods at her.*) I'm going to give all of you a party with the fifty dollars. (*Adding as an afterthought.*) That is, if we win it. I'll ask father for a few hundred extra so we can make it a jolly little affair. Oh, isn't drama just *too* exciting!

RICHARD (*finally getting out of her clutches*). Yes, isn't it? Come on Janet, let's go up and watch the play.

JANET. All right.

[*She and Richard exit.*]

GWENDOLYN. I haven't seen Ken or Jerry all evening. (*She laughs artificially.*) They really shouldn't give up already.

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BABS. Ken's in jail and Jerry has probably gone to the South Pole; so you have a clear field.

GWENDOLYN (*unable to stop smiling*). Why, what do you mean? (*Madge and Kay enter from the left rear.*) Oh, hello, Madge dear, what is all this about Ken and Jerry?

MADGE. Hello, Gwen, congratulations on your play. I only saw the latter part, but it was very good.

GWENDOLYN. It's so sweet of you to say that, darling. I hope Ken's and Jerry's will go well, too.

MADGE. Well, if Jerry doesn't get here soon, Ken's won't go on at all.

GWENDOLYN (*without concealing her delight*). Oh, that would be dreadful! Can't you get poor dear Ken out of jail?

MADGE. I can if his play wins the prize. The fine is fifty dollars. But since the star actor isn't even here, I don't see much hope.

GWENDOLYN (*patting Madge's arm*). Well, don't upset yourself about it, dear. Everything will come out all right. (*She seizes Hugh again.*) Come on, Rodney Van Smythe, let's go up and see "Tenth and Biddle."

HUGH (*trying to hold back*). Wouldn't you like to come, Babs?

BABS (*wriggling the toes of her stockinged feet*). No, thanks, I'd rather not walk.

HUGH (*as Gwen drags him out*). I sure hope Jerry gets here, Madge. Is there anything I can do?

MADGE. I'm afraid not, Hugh. Thanks, anyway.

GWENDOLYN. Come on, Hugh.

HUGH. Oh, all right. Don't worry, Madge. Jerry won't fail you.

[*He and Gwen go out.*]

MADGE (*pacing nervously up and down*). Something must have happened to Jerry. Oh, what can we do? Ken worked so hard on his play — so did I, for that

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matter — and now he can't even see it produced. Maybe it won't be produced!

KAY. Now, don't talk like that, Madge. Every cloud has a silver lining; it's always darkest right before the dawn; after the rain the sun is bound to shine; April showers bring May flowers; life is just a bowl of cherries, and . . .

STOOP (*coming in hurriedly*). Madge, you're wanted on the 'phone. It's somebody from the jail.

MADGE. From the jail? Oh, good heavens!

[*She rushes out.*]

KAY. Who is it? What did he say?

STOOP. He just said he was calling from Station 48 in East St. Louis and asked for Miss Madge Temple.

KAY. Oh, I hope it's good news! It wasn't Ken, was it?

STOOP. Oh, goodness me, no. Oh, no, it wasn't Ken. I know Ken, Kay. You know I'd know Ken.

LLOYD. Well, you might, and then again you might not. Sit down here, and let me finish your make-up.

[*Stoop obeys.*]

BABS. I wonder who it can be.

BUD (*entering with Ralph*). Any news of Jerry?

LLOYD. No, none whatever.

RALPH. We've been trying to 'phone him every few minutes. My God, what are we going to do?

KAY. Madge was just called to the 'phone. Stoop thought it was someone from the jail, but it may be something about Jerry.

STOOP. Maybe Jerry's in jail, too.

BABS. We could just take the audience over to the jail and give the play there.

BUD. Sure, the familiar atmosphere might inspire us.

LLOYD. Who's going to win the acting prize?

RALPH. Well, Jerry will have a swell chance if he ever gets here. That is, provided that Stoop doesn't take it away from him.

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STOOP. Kay, I've got it straight now. It's you I won't return without.

BABS. What is he muttering about?

STOOP. It's my part, Babs. I was having a little trouble with it, but I've got it all right now. "Colonel Neville, you have nothing to worry about; I will not return without . . ."

[He pauses in confusion. Madge reënters. A chorus of "Who was it?" "What's happened?" "Was it Ken?" "Was it Jerry?" greets her.]

MADGE. It was one of the wardens at the jail. Ken's cell mates are all excited about the contest, too. They got the warden interested and induced him to call to see how things were going.

BUD. What did you tell him?

MADGE. I just couldn't let Ken know that Jerry isn't here; so I said everything was fine, that the order of the program had been changed and we hadn't gone on yet. He's going to call again in a little while.

BABS. That's the spirit, honey. Always keep them in the dark. Well, much as my feet advise against it, I think I'll go up and see what's left of the play. I will pray for you, children.

[She limps out, carrying her shoes in her hand. Ralph rushes to her assistance.]

RALPH. Here, lean on me.

LLOYD. Why don't you carry her?

[Babs and Ralph exit.]

MADGE. It's bad enough to think that Ken can't see his play, but if we can't even give it . . . *(Mr. Carlton comes in.)* Oh, Mr. Carlton, he isn't here yet. What shall we do?

MR. CARLTON. Someone else will have to take the part, I suppose. I don't know what else we can do. How about you, Lloyd?

LLOYD. Me? Why, I haven't even read the play.

STOOP. We'll tell you what it's about.

SWEET "16"

LLOYD. That's very nice of you, but no, thank you.

KAY. Richard's awfully good at ad-libbing. Maybe he could do it.

BUD. He'd never fit in the uniform.

MR. CARLTON. Get it, will you, Bud?

[Bud goes into the men's dressing room.]

MADGE. Even if you can find someone else to take the part, the play won't have a chance. Oh, Mr. Carlton, why don't we have understudies?

MR. CARLTON. Well, this has never happened before. Actors have been late, but they've always shown up eventually. *(Bud returns with the uniform. Mr. Carlton inspects it.)* No, I'm afraid Richard can't get in that. Well, we're certainly in a fine pickle. Wait until I get hold of Jerry Hodge!

BUD. It will be a pleasure for several people.

MADGE. Oh, Mr. Carlton, Ken worked on his play the whole week before it was due. We've just got to put it on!

JERRY *(appears in the right rear doorway. His tie is missing, his hair is mussed, he is very disheveled. He appears to be in a kind of daze. When he speaks, his voice is barely audible)*. Good evening.

MADGE. Jerry!

MR. CARLTON *(glares icily at Jerry for a moment without saying a word)*. Hurry up and get ready.

[Bud and Stoop grab Jerry and his uniform and push him into the dressing room.]

BUD. Don't bandy words, dear heart, your hour has come!

[Stoop comes out again. Bud stays in the dressing room to help Jerry.]

STOOP. Babs' prayers have been answered.

KAY. Hallelujah!

MR. CARLTON. Stoop, you and Bud put his boots on him. Lloyd, get him ready as fast as you can. I'm going back upstairs.

SWEET "16"

[*He leaves.*

JOE (*coming in. He wears overalls*). Helen can't find the brass candlesticks. Kay, will you come up and help her look for them? Things are sort of messed up.

KAY. All right, Joe. (*She gives Madge a hug as she goes out.*) Everything's going to be all right now, Madge.

MADGE (*sitting down weakly in a chair*). Thank heavens, he's here.

[*The cast of "Tenth and Biddle" returns. They remove their make-up as they talk.*

ADA. Well, we're certainly glad to hear that our author has arrived. It's too bad he missed his own play.

LLOYD. How was it?

BILL. Boy, we were colossal. Tom, you never did give me the cue for my entrance.

SHIRLEY. How in the world did you know when to come in?

BILL. Oh, I just came in. And Ada knocked the whole fruit cart over. Lord, I just couldn't help laughing.

ADA. Oh, I feel terrible about it.

TOM. Lots of people thought it was intentional, Ada. Forget it.

BILL. Sure, you got the biggest laugh in the show.

TOM. Listen, Stoop, if you want to be a hit, just knock things over. The folks love it.

MADGE. Stop it! Stoop can pull enough boners without any coaching.

SHIRLEY. I wish you luck, Stoop.

[*Bud drags Jerry out of the dressing room and shoves him into the make-up chair. He and Stoop each put one boot on Jerry and begin lacing. Lloyd starts on his make-up. The three are more or less in each other's way; all try to hurry as much as possible, which helps to complicate matters.*

MADGE (*going over to Jerry*). Oh, Jerry, whatever made you so late? I've been nearly frantic. (*Jerry tries to*

SWEET "16"

speaks, but Lloyd's vigorous smearing of cold cream on his face prevents him.) We were arrested coming over, and poor Ken is in jail under a fifty dollar fine. Isn't that terrible? He won't even get to see his play. Jerry, our only hope is the prize money. You will put it over for him, won't you? You know how much it means to Ken. We were planning a big celebration to-night if he should win. And now we need the money to get him out of jail. The honor would at least be some consolation. Oh, Jerry, say you'll put "Southern Accent" over for Ken!

JERRY (*having struggled to speak throughout Madge's long speech and finally succeeded in shoving Lloyd away*). "Put 'Southern Accent' over for Ken!" Get Ken out of jail! Console Ken! Win the prize for Ken so Ken can celebrate!

MADGE. Why, Jerry, I . . .

JERRY. "Poor Ken, he won't even get to see his play. Isn't that terrible?" Well, I didn't get to see my play, did I! You don't give a damn about what happens to me. Poor Ken is in jail. I've been in an accident; I might have been killed, and all you care about is winning the prize for Ken!

MADGE. Jerry, stop yelling!

JERRY. Damn it, I won't stop yelling! I've got a right to yell. You and Ken want to celebrate! Well, isn't that nice!

MADGE. Jerry Hodge . . .

JERRY. I asked you — and before Ken Rainer did, I happen to know — to celebrate with *me* tonight if I won the prize. I suppose you thought I didn't have a chance. Well, if you thought "Southern Accent" was so wonderful, don't come around now begging me to put it over!

BUD. Easy, Jerry.

JERRY. I've a good notion to throw his damned play . . .

MADGE (*she has been growing more and more angry during*

SWEET "16"

Jerry's speech). [Why, you poor little boy. Didn't we make a fuss over you, after you've come two hours late and driven us all nearly crazy? And just because I have a date with Ken tonight you're going to throw his play! You amuse me, Jerry. Do you think you're such a John Hampden that you can make or break a whole play at your divine will? "Begging" you to put "Southern Accent" over! I was flattering you, you conceited ninny. Why, you couldn't put anything over a toothpick.]

JERRY (*furiously*). I'll show you what I can do, Madge Temple. You've been treating me like a rag long enough. I'll show you what I can do to your darling Ken's play.

MADGE (*yelling also*). Go ahead! Show me! I'm dying to see what you or anybody else can do to ruin "Southern Accent!"

RALPH (*entering hurriedly*). Everybody upstairs! Mr. Carlton wants to rush us on as soon as possible because we're running behind schedule.

[*Lloyd puts the finishing smears on Jerry, whose make-up looks pretty bad. Bud and Stoop dash back to view themselves in the mirror. Stoop gets his hat from the prop table. He keeps muttering "Colonel Neville, don't you worry . . ." Ralph, Bud, Stoop, and Jerry hurry out, Jerry and Madge still yelling at each other.*

JERRY. I'll show you what I can do! I'll give you and Ken something to celebrate, all right!

MADGE. Go, Jerry Hodge! Do your worst! (*Jerry has left by now.*) We . . . don't . . . mind. . . .
[*She sinks wearily into a chair.*

LLOYD. Well, you certainly fixed everything.

ADA. Madge, you know what a temper Jerry has. Why did you goad him like that?

MADGE. Because I have a temper, too. Jerry and I always have had rows like this. (*Flaring up again.*) He had no right to talk to me that way.

SWEET "16"

BILL. I guess Ken's in jail for the winter.

TOM (*to Shirley*). Let's go watch.

[*He and Shirley exit.*]

ADA. Do you think Jerry will really throw the play?

MADGE. He'd better not try it! (*Becoming more calm.*)

But I know he won't. Jerry wouldn't do anything like that.

LLOYD. It would probably mean that his own play would win.

MADGE. He didn't mean what he said any more than I did. Come on, let's go; I don't want to miss any of it.

ADA. They're probably ready to start.

[*She and Madge exit. Lloyd is beginning to pack up the make-up.*]

BILL. Need some help?

LLOYD. No, thanks. You'd better go up and watch the fireworks. I'm not sure that Jerry didn't mean just what he said.

BILL. Jerry'd never throw anybody's play. Least of all with his own in the running!

LLOYD. I hope you're right.

BILL. It would clinch the prize for him. Gwen doesn't have a chance.

LLOYD. None of you seem to regard Gwendolyn's play very highly.

BILL. Gwen's an S.N.C.D.; she's specializing in drama. She'll be mighty surprised when she doesn't win the prize.

LLOYD. Hadn't you better say *if* . . . ?

BILL. George says she probably had sympathy cards printed for the other two playwrights. (*Lloyd laughs.*) She should have passed them to the audience during her own play. (*George enters.*) How's it going?

GEORGE. They got off to a bad start. Jerry's burlesquing and the audience is howling with laughter.

LLOYD. It's not a comedy, is it?

BILL. Lord, no, it's supposed to be heavy tragedy.

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GEORGE. Jerry's really murdering it. He's singing his speeches like a Greek orator.

BILL. I want to see this.

[He hurries out.]

LLOYD. Maybe he'll settle down.

GEORGE. I'm afraid it's too late. The audience is out of control. Poor Kay and Ralph are so upset that they're almost as bad as Jerry. And, of course, Stoop doesn't help matters.

LLOYD. I was afraid Jerry was in earnest.

GEORGE. I can't stand to watch the thing. God, it's awful. *(Madge stumbles in, half running. She is on the verge of hysteria. George is quite dismayed at the sight of her tears. He offers her his chair rather awkwardly.)* Here, Madge, sit down.

MADGE *(ignoring him)*. Lloyd, he's screaming his lines, all on the same tone; he can't do it, he *can't*. . . . We've got to stop him, Lloyd.

GEORGE. The dirty rat!

LLOYD *(trying to get her to sit down)*. Come, now, there's nothing we can do. *(Angrily.)* It's a damned shame!

MADGE *(hysterically)*. It can't happen; I can't believe it. They're laughing at it, Lloyd; they're roaring with laughter at Ken's play. Oh, Jerry, how could you do it!

[She starts to cry again.]

GEORGE *(much alarmed)*. They'll stop laughing, Madge. Jerry will settle down. Please don't cry.

MADGE *(unable to control herself)*. Ken was hoping for such success, and now his play can never be given again. Oh, it's just too horrible!

LLOYD *(sternly)*. Stop it, Madge.

MADGE *(almost shrieking)*. How am I going to tell Ken? How am I going to tell him that his best friend — he was his best friend — is a low, doublecrossing . . .

JOE *(coming in)*. Telephone, Madge. It's the warden again.

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MADGE. Oh! (*Pause, as she struggles to regain composure.*) Joe, I can't talk to him. I just can't. Tell him you can't find me. (*Joe, a little puzzled, nods and starts to leave.*) Don't tell him about the play! Please, Joe, just say it hasn't started yet.

JOE. All right, if you say so.

[*He goes.*]

MADGE. I can't bear to think of Ken's finding out! How can I tell him what Jerry has done!

LLOYD. Listen now, you've got to calm down. You can't help matters by getting so upset. Be a good girl and listen to Uncle Lloyd.

MADGE. Calm down! With Ken in jail, and his play being laughed off the stage! With Jerry, whom I thought was my friend, doing a despicable thing like this! That's what really hurts, Lloyd. I've always thought that Jerry . . . Ken has merely lost a play; Jerry's lost a great deal more.

LLOYD (*softly*). I know.

MADGE. I can hardly believe it; I always thought he was one of the finest boys in the world.

[*Lloyd pats her shoulder consolingly.*]

GEORGE. He's a low-down skunk!

STOOP (*rushing in very much out of breath*). I forgot my sword. Quick somebody, my sword!

[*He rummages excitedly through the props.*]

GEORGE. Hey, stupid, did you just walk out on the play?

STOOP. No, no, I'm not in this part. But I've got to hurry. Madge, don't you know where my sword is? (*Madge manages to regain her self-control and helps in the search.*) Everybody is certainly enjoying our play. You all should come up to watch. Oh, where is my sword?

RALPH (*finding it on the floor in the corner*). Here it is.

[*Stoop grabs it and starts to dash out.*]

LLOYD. How was your "have no fear" line?

STOOP (*pausing in the doorway, an expression of deep de-*

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jection coming over his face). I didn't get to say it. I just said "Colonel Nev—" and Ralph cut me off. After I practiced so hard, too. (*Remembering the play.*) I've got to go.

[*He runs out.*]

GEORGE. Poor Stoop, he thinks everything is going fine. It must be wonderful to be so dumb.

MADGE. It's not very helpful in plays, though. He's probably leaving out every other line.

GEORGE. I don't suppose it makes much difference now.

MADGE (*sadly*). No, nothing makes much difference now.

LLOYD. You've known Jerry for a long time, haven't you?

MADGE. We've gone through school together since the second grade. I thought I could depend on him always.

LLOYD. Don't be too hard on him, Madge. He's been through a lot tonight.

GEORGE. Been through a lot? That doesn't excuse his throwing Ken's play so his own can win!

MADGE. I can never forgive him. Never.

ADA (*hurrying in*). Oh, Madge, Shirley told me you had come downstairs and I was afraid that . . .

[*She pauses.*]

MADGE. I'm all right now, Ada. How is it?

ADA (*angrily*). Jerry Hodge ought to be drawn and quartered! To think that anyone could be so low! Kay and Ralph did their best to save it, but the audience is simply wild. I feel so sorry for Kay; she can hardly talk above the laughter!

MADGE. Oh, Lord.

GEORGE. Damn Jerry! I'm going to black both his eyes!

ADA. His life isn't going to be safe, I know that. Everyone is just furious at him. Mr. Carlton has threatened to disbar his play.

GEORGE. It would be a shame to give the prize to Gwen, but I'm certainly in favor of it. If Jerry gets that fifty dollars, by God I'll make him eat it!

MADGE (*wearily*). Is it nearly over?

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ADA. Well, it's going pretty fast. They're leaving out half of the lines.

LLOYD. Madge, I think perhaps you ought to go home.

GEORGE. I'll be glad to take you, Madge.

MADGE. Home? Why, Ken's in jail. I've got to get him out somehow.

ADA. Now don't be foolish, Madge. There's nothing you can do. Ken will just have to tell his father.

MADGE. That's going to be very unpleasant. And it's going to be worse to tell Ken about his play. But to tell him what Jerry has done is . . . (*She covers her face with her hands.*) Oh, Jerry, how could you do it!

ADA (*putting her arms around her*). Now, Madge. Come on, let's go out for a walk. It'll make you feel better.

MADGE. No, thanks, Ada, I'd rather stay here.

GEORGE. Uh . . . does anybody know who won the swimming meet? I think we had a good ch . . . (*Bud enters.*) Well, Bud, what did you forget?

MADGE. Is your part finished already, Bud?

BUD. Yes, thank God. What do you mean, "already"? It seemed like an eternity to me. Lord, what a nightmare! We'll never live this down. Jerry isn't going to live to try to!

ADA. I certainly feel sorry for all of you. Oh, how I'd like to give Jerry's play again!

LLOYD. Has the merriment let up at all?

BUD. Oh, no. Ralph's death got tears all right, but they weren't tears of sorrow, by any means. You can't imagine how awful it was. We could scarcely make ourselves heard above the guffaws. Lord, may I never act again.

[*He begins to remove his make-up. Stoop and Ralph enter. Ralph flops into a chair and mops his forehead. Stoop begins to remove his make-up.*]

RALPH. I'd like to pull out his hair, one by one.

STOOP. He is undoubtedly a snake in the grass.

SWEET "16"

KAY (*comes in. Her face reveals the strain she has been under. She goes up to Madge*). Madge, for anything I may have had to do with making it an utter flop, I'm sorry.

MADGE (*putting her arm around her*). You had nothing to do with it, Kay, and you know it.

RALPH (*angrily*). For anything you had to do with it! You're sorry! Kay Sherwood, none of us should be anything but rip roaring mad!

[*Jerry comes in slowly. He looks all in. There is dead silence for a moment.*]

KAY. I'd better dress.

[*She goes into the dressing room.*]

BUD. Come on.

[*He and Stoop go into the men's dressing room. Ralph rises, gives Jerry a stony look, then follows them. Jerry gazes dully after them. He comes downstage rather dazedly.*]

GEORGE. Of all the vile, base, contemptible creatures you are the worst. I can't wait to smear you all over the floor!

JERRY (*sullenly*). What do you mean?

GEORGE. You're going to need your filthy fifty dollars you've earned so gloriously. It will get you a nice room in the hospital.

JERRY (*not comprehending*). My fifty dollars . . .

GEORGE (*with deadly sarcasm*). Of course you'd never suspect that *your* play will be awarded the prize!

JERRY (*still bewildered*). Why, I . . .

ADA (*vehemently*). I hope every cent of the money brings you misery!

JERRY (*extremely surprised*). Why, Ada . . . (*Suddenly realizing with a shock that everyone thinks he has thrown Ken's play so his own can win.*) Good Lord! You don't think that I . . . My God, do you think that I tried to ruin Ken's play?

GEORGE (*laughs sarcastically*). Oh, heavens no! Noth-

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ing you have said or done could possibly have given us that impression!

JERRY (*rushing over to Madge*). Madge, do you think I intended to wreck Ken's play? (*She is silent.*) Madge, answer me!

MADGE (*turning her back and walking away from him*).

I'd rather not discuss it, Jerry.

JERRY (*pleading frantically*). We've got to discuss it, Madge. I can't stand having you think I'm a double-crosser! I admit that when I went out on that stage, I was so furious I scarcely knew what I was doing. I deliberately burlesqued. I soon cooled down; but it was too late. Madge, listen to me. (*He tries to turn her around to face him, but she draws away angrily.*) I tried to save the play, Lord knows I tried; I did my very best, I swear to you. The audience just couldn't be controlled. Madge, for God's sake, at least look at me!

[*She does not turn. Jerry stands waiting for a long moment, then crosses the stage very slowly and sinks miserably into a chair.*]

GEORGE (*coldly*). You never realized, of course, that your own play will undoubtedly be awarded the prize.

JERRY. None of you will believe me, but if my play wins I'll never be able to look anyone in the face again. (*Appealingly.*) Good Lord, you all know I wouldn't deliberately throw Ken's play, don't you?

ADA. We all thought you wouldn't throw Ken's play, but . . .

RICHARD (*sticking his head in at the door*). Mr. Carlton says everybody hurry up; you may be called!

[*He leaves again.*]

JERRY (*laughs ironically*). Sure, I'll be called! I'll be crowned with a wreath of laurel! Oh, God!

[*He buries his head in his hands. Lloyd walks over to him and silently lays his hand on his shoulder. Jerry looks up at him gratefully.*]

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GEORGE (*to Ada*). Do you want to go up and hear the decision?

ADA (*nodding toward Madge*). I'll stay here.

STOOP (*coming out of the dressing room and going up to Madge*). Madge (*In a loud stage whisper*.) Ken's in jail and Jerry's a dirty dog, so if I win the acting prize, will you celebrate with me tonight?

[*Madge manages a weak smile as she shakes her head.*]

BUD (*coming out of the dressing room*). Well, don't any of you have the courage to go upstairs?

GEORGE. I'll go with you.

[*They leave. As they open the door, the sound of loud applause is heard above. Everyone stands tense, listening.*]

LLOYD. That's it.

KAY (*hurrying out of the dressing room*). Who is it?

ADA. We don't know yet; we . . . well, for heaven's sake, lets find out.

[*She starts toward the door. Ralph comes out of the dressing room. Richard bursts in, very much out of wind. There is a tense moment as he struggles to get his breath.*]

RICHARD. Boy, oh boy, those judges are all right. You should have seen the old guy who made the announcement. He's got a smile six feet wide.

RALPH. What is it?

RICHARD. He said that in the opinion of the judges it's the best comedy English 16 has ever produced.

ADA. "Tenth and Biddle" won then?

RICHARD. They're sure enthusiastic about it!

RALPH (*yelling*). WHO WON?

RICHARD. Why, I just told you. Ken won. "Southern Accent" is the funniest burlesque ever put on by amateurs, unquote, and the, quote, sympathetic interpretation of the rôle of Captain Fuller won the acting prize for Jerry Barrymore Hodge!

[*Everyone stands stupefied, too amazed to move. Sud-*]

SWEET "16"

denly Jerry leaps up, seizes Madge and whirls her 'round and 'round the room.

JERRY (*shouting exultantly*). We've won, we've won!
. Hurrah, hurrah! Madge, darling, you've got to forgive me now!

MADGE (*delighted at Jerry's joy and beginning to laugh with him*). Jerry, stop!

RICHARD. They're calling for you upstairs, Jerry.

JERRY (*holding Madge's hand as they start toward the door*). Come on, Inspiration, let's go up and take a bow; and then we'll dash over and get Ken O'Neill out of the hoosegow!

[*Everyone laughs gayly as the curtain falls.*]

BOX CAR HEADING WEST

A Drama for a Full Male Cast

By

GORDON DALINE

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CAST

PETE, *rough, menacing, strong-arm thug.*

GREEN, *Communist orator, intent, passionate, small.*

RUBE, *former big wheat farmer, old, white-bearded.*

FLASH, *"tin-horn" gambler.*

JERK, *peddler of cheap dope.*

SEEDY, *former farm hand, working for Jerk.*

WASH, *D-horn.*

SCENE. The interior of a refrigerator box car partially loaded with bananas.

TIME. The present.

BOX CAR HEADING WEST

It is night. The train is moving. The beating sound effect of a fast freight sinks to a rhythmic murmur when the dialogue begins.

Men are sprawled flat, with their faces close to the floor, all centered around a small light, except Rube who is half seated by the banana crates at one end.

Posted in the car are two signs announcing "Heated Car," and underneath in red letters, "Warning — Poisonous Fumes."

One-half of the thick, ice-box-like door that opens outward is being held slightly open by Green, by a kind of hooked rod which he holds. A dim light is cast over the group by the metal oil lamp, the kind that loaders use to see with, and to test the presence of heater gas. (If gas is present, the flame sinks because of lack of oxygen.) On the floor, now, the air from the opening in the door keeps the lamp burning.

At each end of the box-car is a small, heavily-screened square near the top. This is where the heat enters, as the heaters are located behind the inside end walls, in the bunkers, out of sight and reach. As the scene opens, all of the men are very still except Pete, who begins to roll and twist. He is awakening from a drunken sleep.

PETE (twisting and lifting his head with a long groan).

Uhh . . . hh. (He sits up.) Say, wat da hell! Wat's dis, anyway? Where's dis rattler headin', anyway? (Looks around at sprawled forms and his tone becomes menacing.) Say, youse guys, dis rail-hopper headin' West? Me, I'm headin' West! Where's dis ting headin', hah?

GREEN (who is holding door slightly open). You're okay,

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buddy. We're all friends, see. Everything's okay.
My name's Green. Green. Just call me Green, see.
We're all friends in here.

PETE. Wat da hell! Who's askin' ya? Say, wat's
dis . . .

VOICES. Aw, lay down.

Pipe down, Green.

They ain't nothin' wrong.

Sure we're headin' West, fifty per.

Northwest ya mean, acrost the border.

Hell, where the wheat is is West.

Ya better lay down.

PETE. Dat's talkin'. Headin' West, hah? Dat's okay.
Any place West . . .

FLASH (*sarcastically*). Headin' West for the thrashin',
eh big boy? Gonna thrash the wheat, ain'tcha?

PETE (*with hard contempt*). Wheat!

[*A momentary silence, then a couple of mocking laughs
and gestures are directed at Pete.*]

FLASH (*mockingly and contemptuously*). Wheat!

JERK (*mockingly and contemptuously*). Wheat!

WASH (*giggling crazily and holding out a bottle*).
Wheat . . .

[*He breaks off, giggles, pats the bottle and puts it in his
shirt.*]

SEEDY (*strangely, almost frightened*). Wheat . . .

GREEN (*as if he were wondering*). Wheat?

FLASH (*gesturing at Rube*). Hey! Ain'tcha gonna
harvest the "wheat" too?

[*No answer. All the "wheat"s have been said with a
queer suggestive emphasis.*]

PETE (*who has been peering around, puzzled, at the mock-
ing of his remark*). Say, who're youse guys, anyway?
Ya tryin' ta be funny?

FLASH (*elaborately*). Oh, we're just some bums headin'
to the harvest.

PETE (*shaking his head*). Maybe I'm a little drunk yet.

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Youse guys sounded kinda funny ta me. (*Menacingly.*) Say, youse guys don't wanna git funny wit me! (*Peers around again and then relaxes.*) Aw, hell. (*Somewhat sheepishly.*) I met a bunch o' pals in Minneapolis an' went on a real bloomer. (*Domineering, boastful.*) But I got right where I wanted ta git, anyway. I always gits where I wanna. (*Then elaborately, mimicking Flash.*) I'm jist a bum headin' to tha harvest.

JERK. Yer hit 'er right to git West.

SEEDY (*who speaks with a heavy, fumbling kind of speech*).

Ya come stumblin' down the tracks makin' a racket an' we wuz layin' in here with the doors almost shut, scared ya'd bring a raft of brakies 'n R.R. bulls down on yer tail. We'd a got five years, gittin' caught in a loaded fruit car. But ya found the door, sure as shootin', an' crawled in an' went ta sleep. (*Mopping his head.*) Whew, we almost suffercated in here with the doors almost closed.

JERK. Yeah, yer picked a reefer. She's a fast fruit train high-tailin' along at fifty per. Don't stop fer nothin'. Yer hit a fast one all right, a real hot-shot. How d'jer find 'er?

PETE. I always picks da hot-shots. (*Mysteriously.*) I'm in da know.

FLASH. She's a hot-shot all right, but that ain't all. She's a reefer an' this car's partly loaded with bananas, an' the heaters are lit at night to keep 'em okay. Ya gotta keep yer nose on the floor if ya don't wanta wind up on a slab. The gas is bad. Look here. (*He lifts up the oil lamp slowly. As it goes higher the flame sinks rapidly.*) It'll put ya out like this light if ya ain't careful. Damn glad one of the loaders forgot this thing. It'll tell ya how the air is. Ya can't smell that heater gas much.

[*He puts the lamp down on the floor again and the flame brightens.*]

JERK. Green's got th' door open, ain't 'e? 'E's got it

BOX CAR HEADING WEST

hooked so it won't slam shut. All ya need is a little air on th' floor, ain't it? Ain'tcha ever rode with th' heaters before? Jest need a little air on th' floor, that's all. Jest keep yer nose down.

PETE. Banana car, hah? Heaters, hah? (*He lies back on the floor.*) I tought it wuz funny youse guys wuz so flat. Ain't it kind of early fer da heaters?

VOICES. October, ain't it?
Cold as hell at night.
These damn prairies.

JERK. It ain't nothin'. Green's holdin' th door, ain't 'e?

GREEN. Sure, sure, I've got the door, buddies. I'm taking it. That's my part of the job now. It's just the obvious part, that you can see, but we're all together, buddies, sticking together and . . .

PETE. Wat da hell, dat's okay, Bo. Yer doin' da work an' youse gits de credit. But if yer tired, hell, I'll hold da door. Here, lemme git de rod.

FLASH Aw, don't mind Green. He wants ta handle it.

GREEN (*to Pete who has begun to edge over*). Here, listen here, buddy. I ain't talking about you and me, see. I'm talking about all of us, all of us people who do the work in the world. We're the workers, see. We're doing all the work that gets done. We work and . . .

PETE (*with hard contempt*). Work!

[*Momentary silence, then mocking laughs and gestures.*]

Pete half lifts himself up.

FLASH (*mockingly and contemptuously*). Work!

JERK (*mockingly and contemptuously*). Work!

WASH (*giggling and waving his bottle again*). Work . . .

[*He continues with his silly giggling, lifts the bottle and tries to drink, shakes it, tries again, holds it upside down, tries again frantically, and then throws his arms about his head. Nobody notices.*]

SEEDY (*strangely, almost frightened*). Work.

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FLASH (*looking and gesturing toward Rube*). Hey! Ain'tcha gonna work, too?

[*He laughs. There is no answer.*]

PETE (*now sitting, peering suspiciously again*). Say, wat da hell! Youse guys is tryin' ta be funny! Ya tryin' ta be funny wit me? Say, does ya know who da hell yer tryin' ta git funny wit? Ya wanna listen when I talk an' not git funny. I bashes guys, bashes 'em jist fer fun. Dat's me pastime, bashin' guys. Dat's me work, bashin' guys wat ain't even tryin' ta be funny. If ya knew me . . .

FLASH (*laughing mirthlessly*). We know ya, big boy. We looked ya over. How d'ja think ya got in this car? We wasn't havin' no mugs in here. (*He laughs again.*) Pete the Basher, ain't it? Sounds like him, don't it, fellers?

JERK (*joining in*). Pete the Basher! Uses 'is mits ta put mugs ta sleep with if they ain't drunk enough. Then yer rolls 'em fer their dough. I seen ya workin'.

PETE (*who has been drawing himself in preparation for whatever happens, snarling*). Funny guys, hah? All together on me, hah? Tink I can't spot ya in here an' git ya after. (*He fumbles in his bundle and draws out a flashlight.*) Smart boys, ain'tcha? But who da hell else does ya think ya are? (*The light spots Flash, who doesn't even shrink from the sudden brightness.*) Smooth boy, hah? Use ta de bright lights, hah. Lemme see. Dat slantin' map . . . yas, yas, I've seen dat before. Fargo it wuz, yas, you trimmin' de suckers wit a stacked deck, sendin' de farm hands home in der socks, an' rollin' crooked dice in de transient camp. (*Pete relaxes somewhat from his tense attitude.*) No wonder ya knowed me. Trimmin' da mugs. (*He laughs, shortly.*)

Who else we got in dis car? (*He spots Jerk, who twists and flinches from the light.*) Hey! Hold still, youse!

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(The light travels down his body, then back.) Youse ain't so big. Put yer mits down. Give a look at da little birdie or papa will bash ya. *(Jerk's hands jerk queerly as he draws them away.)* Yer mits shakin'. Ain't ascared of Pete, is ya? Say, wait a minute. Dose screwy eyes. Dose mits jerkin'. Yas, ya peddles da stuff, don'tcha? Dope, hah? Yas, I seen ya in Miles City. Ya had a coon witcha. Youse looks too much like a dope ta carry yer own stuff. An' before dat I seen ya up by da border. Youse had a kid witcha den. Yeah, he propositioned me once. I was gonna bang him. Jeez, he was only a kid, so I pushed his face an' kicked his tail. Say, does ya remember dat, up by da border, when yer kid came bawling? *(He laughs.)* Say, where's da coon an' da kid. Carryin' da stuff fer ya? *(He laughs again.)* Who ya got witcha dis trip?

[The light rather aimlessly is on Seedy.]

JERK. That's 'im. Yer got 'im in yer light. I jest got 'im. Drivin' a lousy team, 'e was. Didn't know whether 'e was comin' or goin', I cud see. "How much yer git-tin'?" I says. "Buck a day," 'e says. "How about two bucks, workin' fer me?" I says. 'E climbed down. "I'll bring back the horses," 'e says. "Ta hell with the horses," I says. "I'll bring back the horses," 'e says. I waits fer 'im almost a hour. "Had ta feed the horses," 'e says when 'e gits back. Cripes! "I'll give yer a buck-an-a-half a day," I says. "Two," 'e says, "I'm gonna git me a piece of land some day. Two bucks," 'e says. "Okay," I says, "a guy as dumb as you is worth it."

[He laughs, almost soundlessly.]

PETE. Some stuff, hah? *(He spots Seedy again.)* Ya knows yer stuff there, Dope. He oughtta last awhile. Ya wouldn't tink a seed like dat wuz carryin' da goods. Youse guys knows da game. Who else? *(He spots Green, peers intently, and then exclaims.)* Say, how did

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youse git in here? Where's da box? Jeez, I didn't know ya without da box. I wuz gonna listen ta ya once down in Denver, an' once in Aberdeen, an' once in Minot, but I never got da time. Wat's da racket, Bo, who pays off fer dat stuff?

VOICES. Say, th' D-horn's actin' funny.

Twistin'.

He's drunk.

D-horns is always drunk, ya sap.

(Pete spots Wash with the light. The bottle is lying empty.)

'E ain't got nothin' ter drink.

He'll croak.

Naw, jist git sick.

Sick, hell, he'll git the D.T.'s.

That'll be wors'n croakin', fer us.

SEEDY. Maybe he'll last till we git some place.

PETE. A D-horn? He better, or else . . .

[He looks meaningly around, and then spots the door with the light.]

VOICES. Ya damn right.

That's it.

Ya bet.

WASH. A little air . . . fellers . . . I'll be okay.

[He puts his arm over his head and becomes quiet.]

PETE. Der ain't much air inside of dis here boat, baby.

FLASH. Ya better lay down yerself or you'll be knowing it.

PETE *(relaxing back with a grunt and turning off his light)*. Aw, I eats it up. Dis heater gas is old stuff ta me, see. I knows da game. *(Then looking around, slowly.)* Say, dis is a carload of babies wat knows da game, ain't it? Jeez, an' I thought youse guys wuz jist tryin' ta be funny.

FLASH *(elaborately)*. Oh, we're just some bums headin' fer the harvest.

[They laugh, a short, metallic barrage.]

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PETE (*continuing*). It seems kinda funny, not havin' no mugs here, jist us in dis car.

JERK. Mugs ain't got enough brains fer this. They rides th' slow freights, bouncin' on top like a bunch of crows.

PETE. Yeah, dis is de style fer us, hittin' along fifty per.

FLASH. Wonder where we are now. Hey, Green, take a squint.

GREEN. It's kind of dark to see much.

SEEDY. Lemme look. I kin see good. I kin smell.
(*He begins crawling to door.*) When ya can't smell no corn an' no oats, but jes wheat, then yer gittin' there.
[*He looks out.*]

VOICES. Any lights?

Whatcha smell, wheat?

Wheat, hell, ya smell some meat?

Meat, dat's it! Dat's wat we is lookin' for.
Meat!

Ya smell some meat fer us, Seedy?

Some stiffs in da boxcars?

Some mugs that wanna roll dice?

Some guys that wanna hit th' pipe?

Watcha see?

Aw, pull in yer neck.

Da meat smells good, hah?

[*Seedy pulls in his head.*]

SEEDY. We're gittin' there. Few more hours.

FLASH. Any towns comin' up?

SEEDY. Naw, only wheat. No corn an' no spuds, only . . . only . . . (*He fumbles for words.*) only wheat stretchin' out an' out as far as ya kin see. The moon is shinin'. The wheat is purty, stretchin' out an' out . . . an' quiet an' lonesome.

JERK. Gives me th' creeps th' prairie does, miles an' miles of it stretchin' . . .

FLASH. It brings the mugs.

JERK. Cripes. I wonder why. Cripes.

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PETE. Wat da hell do we care? Say, I got a new little racket cooked up I could tell youse guys about. (*He pauses to look around carefully, and then he turns the light on Rube.*) Say, who is dat guy, anyway?

VOICES. Seedy knows 'im, 'e said.

I guess he's sick.

What's his racket, Seedy?

Yer said 'e wasn't comin' out here ter work.

He's an okay fellow, I guess.

Yeah, what's the new racket, Pete?

PETE (*who has evidently reconsidered*). Aw, it ain't nuttin'. Youse knows da way I works. It's jist about da same.

FLASH. C'mon, Pete. We're all in the game.

PETE. Aw, it ain't nuttin'. (*Then to Seedy.*) Who didja say dat guy wuz? I ain't heard him say nuttin'. Kinda funny. Is he okay? Does he fit? Is he in da game?

SEEDY. I dunno. But he kin cuss the wheat better'n you guys kin. He kin cuss the wheat. (*He gestures toward Rube.*) He's layin' there like that in the bananas because he gits sick when he kin smell wheat a mile off. That's how he kin cuss it. (*He pauses and looks around at the men, who grunt for him to continue.*) Once he owned this country right, and had his wheat reachin' so far ya couldn't see the end of it no matter which way ya turned. I worked fer him. Fifty men he had ready to cut it one fall. An' it didn't git ripe . . . the way it's supposed ta. An' every mornin' he stood, rubbin' it in his fingers an' cussin' it. An' then he told the men ta pitch in. "Let it git ripe on the ground," he said. An' it was cut, an' it rained an' the wheat got black. He paid us off, our buck-an-a-half a day, an' then he stood alone with his thrashin' rig an' the black wheat comin' in on him as far as you could see.

GREEN (*who has been listening intently*). A dollar-and-a-half a day he paid you? That land that you said

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reached as far as you could see with wheat was paid for by you men, working under a slave system. Why shouldn't the wheat rot? A dollar-and-a-half a day! That's what drives men to crime under this system!

VOICES. Dat's right, Green.

Now yer talkin'.

The first thing ya said all night.

A buck-an-a-half a day! An' him gittin' rich!

That's what gits us down.

SEEDY (*breaking in*). I ain't finished. That wasn't all.

The same thing happened next year, only the wheat was ripe. We cut it an' then it rained an' the wheat got black. An' there he was wit his thrashin' rig ready, an' the wheat black.

VOICES. Fun, hah?

That fixed the guy, I betcha.

Ya bet.

SEEDY (*continuing*). An' the next year it was the same, only it happened different. We cut the wheat an' then one feller what was our leader says, "Ya got our dough this year? Ya got any money left?" He said he'd pay us as soon as he could sell some wheat. The wheat was ripe an' heavy at the top. "You git our dough first an' then we'll cut it," our leader says. We stalled around. It rained, an' kept on three days then. We quit the first night. I heard he went nuts. Then I saw him on the freights.

GREEN (*excitedly*). That's our way, men! That's organization against the bosses! It's like this, see. There's rulers at the top, workers at the bottom. There gets fewer and fewer of the ruling class at the top, more of the oppressed at the bottom. There's exploitation and oppression of the masses by the rulers. Then organization and unity of workers begins at the bottom. The wheel turns over. (*He motions.*) It's all a wheel that turns! Our way is unity and organiz . . .

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PETE. Aw, pipe down! Youse talks sense about dough sometimes, an' then ya talks about screwy wheels!

VOICES. That's it, Pete.

You tell 'im, Pete.

PETE. Aw, I dunno nuttin' about it. I guess dat guy up der (*He indicates Rube.*) ain't so hot, though. Hell, he ain't wit us, anyway. Hell, he didn't git his stuff square wit his mits. He's jist a skunk, only Green don't know how ta say it. Somebody oughtta bashed him.

SEEDY. Gee, I dunno. I remember him. I remember him way back when he was jist a feller with a little piece of land. I was a kid. He was alone then on his land with his patch of wheat, watchin' it an' touchin' it ta see if it was ripe. An' he wasn't cussin'. He jist looked like he was glad ta be there alone, waitin' fer his wheat ta git ripe, alone an' glad. I wisht some day I could . . .

GREEN (*unable to restrain himself*). Yes, he thought he loved land once. That's the beginning! Then he hired men at slave wages because his love was selfish. Then he was stirred by being a ruler, over man and over land. It grew in him, to rule, to crush, to feel the rhythm of man and land beneath him, to see men swaying in sweat at his gesture. That's the part of it you can understand. That man is a symbol. He's the symbol of a decaying system.

PETE (*who has been stirring restlessly*). Say, youse! I told ya ta cut it; ta can da heat! Ya uses up da good air, blattin'. Can it, or I'll bash ya.

JERK (*excitedly*). The D-horn! 'E's twistin' again!

FLASH (*with a hard laugh*). Maybe the snakes is beginning.

[*Pete spots Wash in light.*]

WASH (*his fingers writhing*). The little green ones . . . between my fingers . . . say fellers, I need some air . . . oh . . . h.

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JERK. Cripes, Pete, I don't like it. I don't like ta hear that. Maybe if ya knocked 'im cold 'e'll last till . . .

PETE. I dunno, I . . .

WASH. Don't do anything . . . fellers. I'll be okay . . . a little air. Talk ta me! Talk ta me! (*He moans.*) I'll be okay.

[*He quiets down.*]

PETE (*considering*). I dunno . . . about banging him. D-horns is too filled wit' alky an' canned heat. Dey's hard ta kayo. (*Turns light on door.*) We could give him da air, dough.

[*Men crowd toward Wash.*]

SEEDY. Aw, wait. Maybe he'll last out.

PETE. Yeah, lay down. Say, gimme a fag, somebody.

FLASH. The air is purty bad now.

PETE. Aw, hell, it ain't nuttin'.

FLASH. Ya seen the sign, didn't ya? An' how the stuff put out the light?

[*Pete spots one of the "Warning" signs momentarily.*]

PETE. Ain't I seen hunderds of dose tings? Dat's nuttin'; a little smoke won't hurt much.

FLASH. Ya can't smell it much, but it's bad.

VOICES. It chokes ya.

Gives ya a headache.

My head ain't so good now.

Ya sees things, like ya was drownin'.

Like a D-horn, hah? Snakes, hah?

Naw, maybe not snakes; some of the things ya has done, maybe. Like drownin'.

JERK. Cripes. Cut it out, will yer? Snakes! Cripes, you guys . . .

PETE. Ain't ascared, is ya? Say, wat'd a dope see, hah? Wors'n snakes, hah? (*Jerk flinches, and Pete enjoys his new rôle.*) How'dja like ta see da guys wat use yer stuff but ain't got no dough ta git none? How'dja like ta see wat dey see, hah? Say, youse ain't scared, is ya? (*In contempt.*) Aw, yellow! Striped right down da

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middle! I'd like ta see da door shut awhile to see youse guys squeal. (*First spots Green, mumbles a moment, and then spots Rube.*) Hey, youse! How'dja like ta see da black wheat again? (*Pause, no answer.*) Or maybe ya thinks ya'd see us sweatin' an' youse rakin' in de dough. (*Silence.*) Aw, hell! (*He turns the light on Flash.*) I betcha youse'd see da suckers wit' der eyes poppin' an' der last two bits sweatin' in der fingers, hah? FLASH. Hell, yass, then I'd see them without their two bits, walkin' home in their socks.

[*Pete and he laugh.*]

PETE. Youse're okay. Look at it an' laugh, hah?

FLASH (*after a momentary silence*). I dunno about . . .

Say, what the hell's the matter witcha?

JERK. Thass what I says.

FLASH. Hell, Pete, what'ud you see yerself?

PETE. Aw, nuttin' fer me. When I bashes a guy he stays bashed!

SEEDY (*breaking in as if he had been talking to himself*).

An' I suppose I'd see like you guys . . . the things . . . I'd hurt the most.

GREEN. The things you'd hurt the most? Men! Men, I said! Is that a man's job, looking backward toward phantoms, when we're trapped in a system as pitiless and bare and filling with death as this box car? Let our vision unite, toward escape! Men, if you were trapped only in this box car you would smash through everything to escape. Trapped in a system, you do nothing. Pete, you with your strength would smash up through that screen (*Motions toward bunker screen.*) toward the door and air, if you were. . .

PETE. Say youse're screwy. (*Spots the heavy, steel screen with his light.*) Dose tings are in der right. I ain't never heard of a guy gittin' trough 'em unless dey was loose. Hell, anyway if dey was easy I'd a been bustin' 'em long time ago, jist fer fun. Say, maybe I could, at dat.

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VOICES. Aw, lay down.
Green's jist spoutin'.
Take a sledge.
Take dynamite.
Ever try ta bust one, Pete?

[*While this goes on, the D-Horn begins to writhe again.*]

JERK (*quavering*). Cripes, Pete, yer gotta do somethin'.
'E's gonna puke, too, an' see things, too.

FLASH. Jeez, Pete, he looks bad.

PETE. Hey der, Seed, lookit an' see if we're out alone in da wheat. See if der's any lights close. (*He turns to Wash.*) Hey der, Bo, ya need some air. Crawl over an' stick yer head out. C'mon der, Bo, it'll help. C'mon der, I'll help youse. (*Wash crawls toward door. Pete turns to Seedy.*) We out in da open? Any lights around?

SEEDY. I don't think ya oughtta. (*He breaks off as Jerk and Pete and Flash tense toward him.*) I dunno . . . yeah, we're in the wheat. It's stretchin' out an' out a long ways quiet. Ya kin see a long ways in the moonlight. Yeah . . .

PETE. Right over here, Bo, the door's a little open. (*To Green.*) Hey, gimme da rod, Green. I'm handlin' this. Hey, leggo.

[*He jerks it from Green, who has not let go. It bangs against the closed half and flies out, as the half that has been held is slammed closed by the rush of wind. The men jump erect, staring stupidly, as Green begins pulling at them and pleading.*]

GREEN. Here, men . . . cool . . . cool. Think now. Get all together now and heave together at the center. All together now. Maybe the lock didn't snap. (*Without a word, Pete turns and pushes him in the face and then lunges futilely at the door, stumbling. There is a mad scramble by the other men, in disorganized effort. Groans and mutters of "Locked in." Then they look silently at each other as Green begins again.*) It's

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locked now; I heard it. You needed a sudden, unified force against the center, not that mad . . .

[Pete lifts his fist toward him. Flash grabs it. Seedy lies down, breathing heavily. The others follow. The flame in the lamp begins to sink slowly.]

PETE. Breathe a minute good, youse guys, an' we'll try again.

FLASH. It was that damn D-horn.

JERK (almost sobbing). An' 'e's still in 'ere. 'E's gonna see things. I'm gonna go nuts.

PETE (snarling). Shut up! Git ready, fellers.

[The lamp dies out. There is the sound of heaving against the heavy door, and curses.]

PETE. Git down an' breathe again, youse! An' shut up.

JERK. Hit me, will yer, Pete!

SEEDY (laughing crazily). Here comes the meat headin' West!

[He laughs again as Pete yells at him to shut up. There is a rushing sound of wheels, loud, to indicate a lapse of time. Pete's voice is then heard, weakly.]

PETE. Yer so still. Yer okay yet, Flash, I kin feel ya breathin'. *(Pause and sound of crawling.)* Yer okay, Jerk, you too. I kin feel ya breathin'. Say somethin'. Youse ain't seein' nothin' funny. Hey, Seedy, yer okay. Ya don't see nothin'. Me, I'm jist tired. Der ain't no gas in dis car. Say somethin', anyway . . . Who's dis? Wat da hell ya doin'? Cripes, it's dark. I can't see nuttin'. Hey, say someting, will ya? *(Then mumbling and feeling around till he finds Flash.)* Wat da hell ya doin'? Hah? Can't ya say somethin'? *(Receiving no answer he feels around and gets Wash.)* Say, youse is Wash, ain'tcha? Hell, it's too dark ta even see snakes now, hah? Hah? Hah? *(Mutters at no answer, and then finds Seedy.)* Hey, youse! Say someting! *(Angrily.)* Wat da hell ya doin'? Ya wanna git bashed? *(He lifts his fist, seems puzzled, and doesn't know what to do. He mutters, crawls around,*

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and lies down again.) Cripes, I guess dey ain't nuttin' ta say, anyway, except dat it's dark as hell. (*Pause.*) Cripes, I'm chokin'. (*Sinks to knees, then speaks fiercely, fist lifted and clenched.*) Hell, der ain't nuttin' dat kin choke me! I'm de basher! (*He relaxes his fist and holds his head in his hands.*) Cripes, ya can't smash nuttin' when ya can't see nuttin'. Hell, I'm chokin' an it's dark . . .

[*He sinks as the curtain falls.*]

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT

A comedy for a full female cast

By

ELISE WEST QUAIFE

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CAST

ELSA.

MISS VAN HOUTON, *a school teacher.*

VERA.

FAY.

JOY DEVINE, *an actress.*

PRUDENCE.

MRS. RAYMOND UPTON, *a member of the School Board.*

SCENE. The waiting room of Dr. Knowles, a plastic surgeon.

Time. The present.

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT

Entrances are at right and left. At center back is a good-sized round table, with a large shaded lamp and magazines. On either side of the table, and against the sides, are straight chairs. On left wall hangs a large mirror, and near it a hatrack.

At the rise of the curtain Elsa and Miss van Houton are sitting, one at either side of the table. Elsa is looking through a copy of "Esquire," Miss van Houton is idly turning the pages of "The Woman's Home Companion."

Elsa is a stylishly dressed young woman in the middle thirties. She has had a nose operation, and court-plaster bandages cover that feature. She has poise and assurance, but is rather sullen. Miss van Houton is a sweet, middle-aged lady, with a quiet voice and manner, and a nice sense of humor. She is plainly, but becomingly dressed. Her face has been lifted; and a white bandage crosses her forehead, goes around her head down under her chin, and around to the back of her neck. Both have removed their hats and coats, which are hanging on the rack.

There is a long moment of silence, for the audience to take in the scene.

ELSA (*throws "Esquire" back on the table*). Why do women always read "Esquire"?

MISS VAN HOUTON (*smiles*). I suppose because it is a man's magazine.

[*She returns her magazine to the table.*]

ELSA. You've said it. We're still primitives, even when we wrangle over the vote.

MISS VAN HOUTON. I am wondering why one never finds interesting reading on the table in a doctor's waiting room.

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ELSA. That's simple, because it would promptly be swiped.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*still smiling*). A doctor's income should enable him to afford small losses.

ELSA. You mean *this* kind of doctor. (*They look at each other rather grimly.*) You have had your face lifted?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Yes. I presume yours was a nose operation.

ELSA. Sure was. (*Impulsively.*) Why did you do it?

MISS VAN HOUTON (*slowly*). I am a school teacher . . .

ELSA (*interrupts*). That's all I need to know. They're the beauty shop specialists these days. Use more lipsticks than the screen artists.

MISS VAN HOUTON. I did not. I never had a beauty treatment in my life.

ELSA (*sincerely*). You probably never needed one.

MISS VAN HOUTON. Thanks, my dear! We all have our little vanities, but mine was not looks. For years I have wanted to be principal of the school where I teach.

ELSA. Why not?

MISS VAN HOUTON. It is a public school in a small, aristocratic New Jersey town. Our principal is retiring this spring, and I would be eligible for the position, but a lady of importance in the community is on the School Board, and she decided I look too elderly. She persuaded the gentlemen — all but one, Mr. Henderson — that she was right.

ELSA. What does she look like?

MISS VAN HOUTON. She is not young.

ELSA. Is she a widow?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Yes.

ELSA. And is the gentleman who stood up for you a widower?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Yes.

ELSA. So! He's fond of you, and she's fond of him;

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and she isn't going to let you have a chance at him in Board meetings, and such.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*surprised*). How did you guess?

ELSA. I'm in "cosmetics." In that business one learns a lot about women.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*rather wistfully*). I am not really old, as years go.

ELSA. Certainly not.

MISS VAN HOUTON. I guess I always took life hard. I did not play enough.

ELSA. I hope you look twenty years younger when the bandages come off, and Mr. Henderson falls for you good and plenty. Let him teach you how to play.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*rather primly*). I have no desire to win attention from Mr. Henderson nor from any other man. (*Suddenly she sits up very erect and speaks with great energy.*) I want that principal-ship. I want to prove to myself that I can swing it.

ELSA. Then, you're a fool. I am not keen on men myself, but when a woman is alone in the world a man is a handy thing to have around the house. (*Bluntly.*) I suppose you're not married.

MISS VAN HOUTON. Oh, no!

ELSA. I didn't think you were. I can generally pick 'em out.

MISS VAN HOUTON. How?

ELSA. Oh, the married ones look placid like cows . . . or flirtatious like rabbits . . . or disappointed like cab horses. Of course, there are exceptions.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*amused*). And the unmarried ones?

ELSA. Hungry like cats, or serene like owls, or cheerful like canaries.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*laughs heartily*). Which am I?

ELSA. You're the cheerful kind, but you don't twitter. And there's a sort of hungry air about you.

MISS VAN HOUTON. Well, since I am not "lean and hungry," as Cassius was, I am harmless. But you, my

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dear? You do not exactly fit into any of those categories.

ELSA. Oh, yes, I am the disappointed wife. I was married once, to a portrait painter. I left him at the end of the first year and went in for cosmetics. I can paint "a blush on a woman's cheek" as well as he could, and I make money doing it. I've a fine position now.

MISS VAN HOUTON. You have a lovely complexion, naturally.

ELSA. That's what sells me to the enterprising cold cream firms. My first job was in a drug store, recommending a face lotion. Of course, I never used it myself.

MISS VAN HOUTON. What do you sell now?

ELSA. I don't sell; I'm a demonstrator. Good firm; excellent stuff; very popular here in America but has never tried to break into the foreign trade. Now, next summer the boss is sending someone abroad; I ought to go, for I'm the best they've got, but naturally they'll pick a "show off."

MISS VAN HOUTON. Can you not qualify? You have a good figure. Your eyes and hair are showy.

ELSA. Yes, but my nose had a hump that would have made a camel jealous.

MISS VAN HOUTON. I see.

ELSA. No, you don't. Dr. Knowles took it off; and I can hardly exist until I find out whether I look like Kathleen, the belle of Killarny, or Irene, the model of Greenwich Village. Did you know that before a plastic surgeon operates he asks whether you desire a tilted, turned up effect, or a classic outline?

MISS VAN HOUTON. No! Not really?

ELSA. Cross my heart. (*Shrugs.*) Oh, well! I'll probably come out looking like a horse instead of a camel.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*seriously*). Dr. Knowles is thoroughly reliable. I think we can hope for the best.

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ELSA. He's a dear, but he's always late. (*She rises and walks across the room restlessly.*) My appointment was for 11.30 sharp.

MISS VAN HOUTON. So was mine.

ELSA. It's after twelve now.

MISS VAN HOUTON. Yes, I know; but he may have been detained by an emergency case. You and I and others like us are only playthings in his busy life. Think of the maimed soldiers whom he helped after the war, and men and women disfigured by accidents. He not only gave them new features, but new futures.

ELSA. Yes, I think of 'em, but when I make a date I keep it, and I am usually furious when he doesn't. (*Touches Miss van Houton lightly on the shoulder.*) Today I'm glad he is late. You're nice. (*Sits down again.*) Have you ever been to Europe?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Once, when I was younger. I went over with a party of school teachers. (*Sighs.*) It was interesting but not gay. (*Whimsically.*) One evening, in a Parisian café, a strange Frenchman asked me to dance with him. I did not dare, because I was afraid of what the other teachers might say. That has been one of the great regrets of my life.

ELSA. Go to Paris on your honeymoon. Frenchy may still be there waiting for you; and there's nothing like jealousy to make a new husband buy you pretty things.

MISS VAN HOUTON. My dear, I shall never marry.

ELSA. Now don't tell me! Tell that School Board gentleman; tell him firmly, but gently, with a twinkle in your eye and not a wrinkle in your face, and I bet he'll make you marry him.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*laughs in spite of herself*). Oh! Anyway, this little conversation has done me good. I was feeling rather low down in my mind this morning.

ELSA. Me, too. A lot of money gone, for what? Own up, if you had it to do over, would you?

MISS VAN HOUTON. No, my dear.

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ELSA. Neither would I. How long were you in the hospital?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Nearly a week. I did not respond quickly.

ELSA. One hears about plastic surgery as if it was a game of tiddledee-winks. Well, it isn't! I could have gone to Europe on my own for less money than it has cost me for this.

[Touches her bandaged nose.]

MISS VAN HOUTON (*sighs*). Yes, these operations are very expensive, and my face is still very painful. Doctor said I could go back to school in a week; that is why I chose Easter vacation. But I have had three weeks of idleness, and this! (*Touches her forehead. She is an optimist, so she adds cheerfully.*) The nurse tells me the doctor may remove my bandages today.

ELSA. Would it matter much if your school people knew?

MISS VAN HOUTON (*with a jerk*). Matter! Mrs. Raymond Upton would publish it far and wide. I should not be able to remain in the school.

ELSA. Is there any danger of meeting the lady before you're healed?

MISS VAN HOUTON. Oh, no! I have stayed right here in New York during my convalescence, and Mrs. Upton is in Bermuda for a month. I do not think I would have dared chance it, had she been at home. She is very much against anything she calls "unnatural."

ELSA. Humph! Pity she hadn't been born with a cauliflower ear.

MISS VAN HOUTON. She was.

ELSA. What!

MISS VAN HOUTON. She has a cauliflower ear, but of course her hair is dressed to cover it.

ELSA. Does Mr. Henderson know?

MISS VAN HOUTON. I fancy he does. In a small town everyone knows his neighbor's shortcomings. But Mr.

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Henderson is not the type of gentleman to be affected by the physical.

ELSA (*laughs shortly*). Nevertheless . . .

[*Prudence, the nurse, enters from right. She is a reassuring person, calculated to inspire confidence and win confidences.*]

PRUDENCE (*briskly*). Sorry the doctor is so late, ladies. He has probably been detained at the hospital, but I am certain he will be here any minute now. If you will come into the treatment rooms, I will get you ready for him.

[*She leads the way, and they exit at right, one after the other without comment. For half a minute the stage is empty; then a bell, off stage, rings twice. Two girls enter from left. Vera is a large, well built girl, very showy and talkative. Fay is a young shy creature with an uncertain air; she holds a silk handkerchief over one side of her mouth. They look around.*]

FAY (*in a loud whisper*). Vera, are you sure this is the right office? No one is here.

VERA. Certainly I am sure. Dr. Knowles' name is on the door. The bell said ring twice and enter. Well, we rang twice and here we are.

FAY. Are you sure my appointment was for 12.30?

VERA (*impatient*). Of course, I am sure. You heard me make it. Listen, Fay, I've given up my lunch hour to come here with you, but if you're going to get cold feet I'll chase right over to the Automat and eat.

FAY. Don't be cross, Vera, please; I'm scared. Are you sure I ought to have come?

VERA. My dear girl, we've been over that a hundred times. You want Harold to love you, don't you?

FAY. But he does.

VERA. Yes, now. Wait until you've been married a while, and every time he looks across the breakfast table at you he sees . . .

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FAY (*tremulous*). Yes, yes, you're right, only father tells me I ought not to spend the money.

VERA. You earn it, don't you?

FAY. Yes, but . . .

VERA. Then you've as much right to spend it beautifying yourself as handing it over to him to bet on the numbers. (*Walks to left entrance and looks out.*) Say, where is everybody? This is more like a morgue than a doctor's office.

[*The bell rings twice again, and Joy Devine sails in. She is an actress, no longer young and rapidly becoming corpulent; but she has a lot of dash and one cannot help but like her. Evidently she has been here before. She waves her hand breezily at the girls, draws out a chair, takes a magazine, sits down and starts to read.*]

VERA (*to Joy*). Excuse me, we had a 12.30 appointment with Dr. Knowles, but nobody answers the bell.

JOY. That's all right. The nurse is probably busy and the doctor has not come in yet. Sit down and make yourselves at home.

VERA. Excuse me, has he . . . I mean have you . . . that is . . .

JOY (*good natured*). He did my nose over, if that is what you are trying to find out. (*Points to her nose.*) Isn't it a treasure now? I had a horrid curve.

VERA. Then he's good.

JOY. Best ever.

VERA. My girl friend . . . Come here, Fay. (*Fay steps forward shyly.*) She has a defect. Show her, Fay.

[*Fay lowers the handkerchief, revealing a large red wart on the left corner of her upper lip.*]

JOY (*airily*). That's nothing, nothing! Doctor will take that off in a jiffy.

FAY. Will it hurt much?

JOY. Oh, just a jab or two.

VERA (*encouraging*). Like the dentist.

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FAY (*tearful*). I nearly die when I go to the dentist.

VERA. You see, it's this way. My girl friend is engaged to be married. Awfully nice feller! They met at a dance a month ago, and because he sells refrigerators this is his busy season, and so far he's only seen her in the evenings. She sticks a bit of black court plaster over that wart and pretends she does it for style. He's never had a real good look at her in the daytime.

JOY (*thoughtfully*). Men are queer creatures.

VERA (*with conviction*). That's what! The boy friend is on the road right now, and I tell her before he comes back she better make the most of herself.

JOY (*with Shakespearean accent*). "Yet for your sake I would be a thousand times more fair." (*To Fay.*) It's not a bad idea.

FAY (*still tremulous*). You don't think it's silly, Miss . . . ?

JOY. Devine, Joy Devine.

VERA. You're an actress, aren't you?

JOY (*delighted*). Yes, indeed.

VERA. I thought I knew your name.

JOY. If you didn't, you will. I have never been able to get leads because my nose scared off the managers. (*Triumphantly.*) Now look at me! (*They do.*) I have a signed contract right here in my purse. I am to shine forth on Broadway at last, with my name on the electrics over the door.

VERA. That's bully.

FAY. Dr. Knowles operated on you?

JOY (*expansively*). I put myself entirely in his hands. Why, child, everybody's doing it. Everybody! Plastic surgery is the greatest of modern blessings. You could never guess what I have been through since I hit this hick town, thinking it was the open gate to the happy hunting grounds.

VERA. I can guess.

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JOY. I would have my whole face taken off and put on again to be a Broadway hit; and I'll be one, you watch me.

VERA. I suppose the play you signed up for is full of sex.

JOY. Brimming!

VERA. Then it will have a run.

JOY. Cannot fail. (*To Fay.*) Little one, Eve might have looked good to Adam even with a harelip, but the modern man has had an eyeful of girls, and take it from me, HE WANTS BEAUTY.

VERA. Certainly he does. Why, there's a guest at our hotel who is so rich that money just sticks to her, and she's nuts on a man who won't look at her because he heard she has a cauliflower ear. At least, that's what she tells me. She came to New York to have Dr. Knowles operate on the ear, and went in hiding at the hotel, where I'm a 'phone operator. I've been taking all her messages up to her, private; that's how she came to confide in me. She's the last person you'd think would have it done. Awful high hat and religious and all that, and terribly cultured! She's a big bug in her home town, on the Board of Education and everything.

[*Prudence enters. Joy rushes at her with outstretched hands.*]

JOY. Oh, here you are, Miss Prudence! I was just about to venture into the inner sanctum and try to find you.

PRUDENCE. Good morning, Miss Devine, how are you?

JOY. Wonderful; simply amazing! I came to see the doctor socially, not professionally, today. I want to tell him I am recommending him to all my friends.

[*Prudence is polite, but reserved.*]

PRUDENCE. Undoubtedly he will appreciate that. (*She turns to Vera and Fay.*) Are you the two young ladies who had a 12.30 appointment?

VERA. Yes, we are. (*Pulls Fay forward.*) This is my girl friend. She wants to talk to the doctor.

PRUDENCE. Sit down, please. He has just come in and

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will be occupied for a short time, and then he will see you.

JOY. "To know him is to love him.

To name him is to praise."

PRUDENCE (*looks quizzically at Miss Devine. She remembers when that lady used language to the doctor which was anything but ladylike*). I am glad you feel that way now, Miss Devine.

JOY. He is wonderful, simply wonderful! (*To Prudence.*) By the way (*Opens her purse, takes out a bill.*) here is the small balance still due him. I received a week's salary in advance this morning. May I go right in and tell him the good news? I am all signed up. I am to play the part of a young grass widow, quite young, and most attractive. I know he will be delighted to hear it, for he did it all, all.

PRUDENCE (*looks carefully at the bill*). Very well, step into his private office. I will let him know you are waiting.

[*The nurse almost winks at the two girls as Joy sweeps out through the right exit.*]

PRUDENCE (*drily*). I assure you Dr. Knowles had nothing to do with making her a grass widow.

[*Exits.*]

VERA. Well, let's hope the play isn't about a modern Juliet. That woman is a bit heavy for a balcony scene. The boards might come down on her lover's head.

FAY (*still tremulous*). Vera, dear, father says if I could catch a toad and hold it against my mouth the wart would go away. He says boys in the country where he grew up always did that when they had warts on their hands.

VERA (*scornful*). Certainly, my dear. Run down to the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, catch the first toad that comes along and try it.

FAY (*in tears*). You are just horrid to tease me.

VERA (*angry*). Say, you're a grand chum, you are. I carry Mrs. Upton's messages free for her; won't take a

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cent extra just to worm out of her the name of her doctor, so I could bring you here and help you. Believe me, it wasn't easy; old Upton is as close with her mouth as with her pocket book. And this is the thanks I get. I'm mean, am I! All right, you can keep your old wart, and when Harold goes off with another girl don't come to me for sympathy.

[She starts toward the exit.]

FAY (*wails*). Oh, Vera, you know I didn't mean it! You are the very best friend I ever had. Please! I just can't talk to the doctor. You do it, please.

VERA. Neither of us will talk to him if we don't get to see him mighty quick. I am due at the switchboard in half an hour.

JOY (*reënters. She is all smiles*). Girls! Girls! Girls! Have you read the best selling book on the market?

VERA. What is it?

JOY. "Believe and Receive"! Know before you start you will finish first at the goal.

VERA. Or the jail. I'd like to believe I own Mrs. Raymond Upton's diamonds. She leaves 'em lying around in her room as if they were marbles. But if I took one I wouldn't receive it; I'd go into the hands of a receiver.

JOY. Do you know Mrs. Raymond Upton? She and I were roommates at boarding school. She is as dumb as a doorbell when nobody rings it. I used to do all her lessons for her. But since she married money she thinks she owns the earth and I am the dust on it. Why, the last time I saw her . . .

[During this last sentence the bell off stage has rung twice. It is Mrs. Raymond Upton herself who enters. A large diamond brooch is on her bosom, and she tries to act as if she were addressing a woman's club, but her head is bound up and she stops short at the sight of Joy. Retreat is impossible, for Joy sweeps forward and seizes Mrs. Upton's reluctant hands.]

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JOY. Why, Caroline Upton, you stranger! I am charmed to see you.

MRS. UPTON (*shortly*). Hello, Lizzie Smith.

JOY. Not Lizzie Smith; Joy Devine. Did you not know I had changed my name. Do you never read about me in the school magazine?

MRS. UPTON. I never see the school magazine.

[*Obviously ill at ease, she tries to exit right, but Joy will not let her escape.*]

JOY. Oh, Caroline, you . . . living your stuffy, small town life . . . have no idea of the joy I experience out in the wide, beautiful world of men.

MRS. UPTON (*patiently, as to a child*). My life is not "stuffy," Lizzie, and I take it my sphere of influence has been quite as broad as your own. Now you must excuse me. It is ever enjoyable to meet one with whom I shared the joys and sorrows of my early years, but I have an important appointment with Dr. Knowles.

VERA (*who has kept in the background, comes forward boldly*). Have you, Mrs. Upton? We all have. You're looking seventy-five percent to the good today. I guess, it won't be long before the doctor takes off your bandage.

MRS. UPTON (*very haughty*). Ah! Miss . . . Miss . . . I do not recall your name.

VERA (*gaily*). I am Vera, one of the 'phone girls at your hotel. I am always bringing you up messages. Don't wonder you don't recognize me when I'm dressed. Those uniforms the manager makes us girls wear are the limit. (*She drags Fay forward.*) Meet my girl friend. She has a defect, and since Dr. Knowles did so well by you, I want him to have a look at her.

MRS. UPTON (*hurriedly*). Yes, yes, my good girl. (*To Joy.*) Now, Lizzie, you must excuse me.

[*But Joy is adamantine.*]

JOY. Why, Caroline, have you had that awful ear of

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yours fixed at last? I told you when we were school girls that your parents should take you to a good surgeon. Of course that is so long ago . . .

VERA. Mrs. Upton swears by Dr. Knowles. Ever since he operated on her ear . . .

[*Unseen, Elsa and Miss van Houton have been standing in the right entrance during the last two speeches. Miss van Houton's bandages have been removed and you see her as she really is, an attractive lady. At this moment, however, she is in a panic. Clever Elsa takes in the situation immediately, and throwing her arm around Miss van Houton most affectionately, advances upon Mrs. Upton.*]

ELSA. So you are the famous Mrs. Raymond Upton! My friend, Miss van Houton, has frequently spoken of the excellent work you are doing on the Board of Education in her city.

MRS. UPTON (*who has courage, ignores Elsa*). Why, Miss Van Houton! I would hardly have expected to meet you in the office of a plastic surgeon.

ELSA. Yes, it is queer she just happened to be here to-day, isn't it? She's such a dear! I dread these nose treatments, and I persuaded her to come with me this morning.

MRS. UPTON. Then you are not here for medical attention, Miss van Houton?

ELSA (*before Miss van Houton can reply*). Are you, Mrs. Upton? I can recommend our mutual doctor. Yours was . . . ?

JOY (*delighted at her opportunity*). Poor Caroline was born with a most unpleasant ear.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*who thinks this has gone far enough*). Mrs. Upton has a perfect ear for music. She organized our school Glee Club, and pays the director out of her own pocket. (*Quite simply she addresses Mrs. Upton.*) I did not intend to announce it, but since you have also come to Dr. Knowles for help, I may as well tell you I have had my face lifted.

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MRS. UPTON (*who has her own standards of honor*). No one shall hear of it from me, my dear Miss van Houton. You are looking remarkably well, but otherwise it is really not noticeable.

ELSA. She has rested up during her vacation.

MRS. UPTON (*who knows when she is beaten*). Since it has done you so much good, Miss van Houton, I must withdraw my objections to you as our school principal. Upon my return home I will at once take the matter up with the gentlemen of the Board.

MISS VAN HOUTON (*calmly*). Thanks, but you need not trouble. The evening before I left home Mr. Henderson asked me to marry him. At the time I said "no," but this young lady (*Smiles at Elsa.*) has persuaded me to change my mind. I shall write him to that effect this evening.

VERA. Whoop — ee!

ELSA (*impulsively kisses Miss van Houton*). Congratulations!

MRS. UPTON (*stiffly*). Permit me to offer my felicitations, also.

FAY (*who is not interested in all this*). Vera, if we can't see the doctor we'd better go. You will be late.

PRUDENCE (*enters, speaks to Vera*). Doctor will see you now. Good morning, Mrs. Upton; come right into the treatment room. Doctor is expecting you.

ELSA. Good-bye!

JOY (*melodramatic*).

"I ask, through throbs of pain,
Where shall we all meet again?"

MISS VAN HOUTON (*suddenly flippant*). Probably right here. Everybody's doing it!

Curtain

AUF WIEDERSEHN

By

SADA COWAN

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CAST

FRAU FRIEDA NEUBERG, *an attractive Jewish woman, of 38 to 40. She is refined, well educated, and lovable, with none of the objectionable characteristics sometimes portrayed. She is dark and handsome, with a slender, wiry figure.*

ELSA, *a blonde Christian girl of about 15, well educated and refined.*

HARTWIG, *Elsa's brother, a trifle older, about 19.*

LEVINSKI, *an old Orthodox Jew, of lower class. He is bearded, and none too tidy. He could be from 40 to 55.*

JOHANN, *a boy of the same age as Hartwig. He is of military bearing.*

A SOLDIER, *typical militarist.*

SCENE. *Living quarters of Frau Neuberg's trousseau shop, Germany.*

TIME. *The present. Afternoon.*

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The room is a sitting room, simply and stiffly furnished with horsehair furniture, tidies on the chairs, and various bits of German pottery and Dresden china in what-nots. There is a large window at the back, draped with crisp white curtains, a door left leading to the outside, and a door right leading into the bedrooms. On various tables and chairs are bags and large wicker hampers in the process of being packed.

At the rise of the curtain, Elsa, a girl of about fifteen, blonde, fresh looking and pretty, is busily packing. She is humming gayly as she folds different pieces of wearing apparel and puts them in the bags.

Frieda, a Jewish woman of thirty eight or forty, enters. She is simple and direct in her manner, and has a face of great character.

FRIEDA. The Baroness ordered a dozen more linen sheets to be embroidered with crown and monogram.

[Frieda sits and picks up a dress which is almost completed, and starts sewing.]

ELSA (*folding clothes*). Oh, how lovely! I wish Baronesses would get married every day.

FRIEDA (*smiling*). So do some of the Baronesses. Come here, dear. (*Elsa does so.*) Let me see if this wristband is tight enough.

[She measures Elsa's wrist with the dress on which she is sewing.]

ELSA. You've such a lot to do, Aunt Frieda; you ought not to be sewing for me.

FRIEDA (*releases her, and she goes back to her packing*). Aren't you packing for me?

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ELSA (*holding up frock*). Do you think you'll use this on the steamer or . . .

FRIEDA (*quietly*). No, I won't need it.

ELSA. Then it can go down in the . . . what do you call it . . . the hold. I'll put it in here.

[*She packs it into a case.*]

FRIEDA. That's right.

ELSA (*packing, very gayly*). It doesn't seem to me you are taking enough warm things. New York is very cold in winter, they say.

FRIEDA. I can get everything I need after I get there.

ELSA. Why don't you smile when you say that? If I were going, I'd be dancing with joy all over the place.

FRIEDA (*not convincingly*). Oh, I'm delighted to be going.

ELSA (*dreamily*). New York, with Aunt Emma and Uncle Charlie . . . Oh!

FRIEDA (*as before*). It's going to be just lovely.

ELSA (*going to Frieda*). Aunt Frieda, tell me something.

FRIEDA. Yes, child?

ELSA. You're going to America because you really want to, aren't you? Not because you have to on account of . . .

FRIEDA. O dear, no! The Nazi have nothing to do with my going. I've really wanted to for a long time and this is such a splendid opportunity.

ELSA (*dropping on her knees beside Frieda*). I'm not sure, Aunt Frieda, and I want to be sure. I couldn't bear to think of you way over there, lonely, longing for us . . .

FRIEDA (*smiling*). Don't you want me to miss you and Hartwig?

ELSA. Of course. But not too much.

FRIEDA. I see, just a little. Like when I see a pretty bit of material that might make you a dress, or a necktie for Hartwig.

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[*For a moment she can hardly bear the thought of leaving.*

ELSA. And you won't stay long, will you?

FRIEDA (*with meaning*). Not longer than I have to. But don't you worry. Frau Hahn will take the best of care of you both.

ELSA. It isn't that. (*Impetuously she throws her arms around the woman.*) I love you. You've been just like a mother to Hartwig and me.

FRIEDA (*staring ahead, caressing the girl*). A hen that raised two goslings, two little Christian chicks with a Jewish mother.

ELSA. But we're just the same. Jews and Gentiles are all alike.

FRIEDA. They used to be, when your mother and I kept this shop while our men went to war . . . when they didn't come back. She and I were like sisters.

ELSA. Of course, I don't remember mother, but I'm sure she couldn't have been any better to us than you have been.

FRIEDA (*affectionately*). Liebchen!

ELSA. I'm so glad she gave us to you to raise.

FRIEDA. I'm glad, too. (*Then suddenly very serious.*) But it would have been better if it had been one of your own people.

ELSA. Why do you say a thing like that? Race doesn't make any difference. Nobody thought a thing about it until all this fuss started.

FRIEDA (*abruptly*). Get up off your knees, child. You'll get your stockings dusty. (*Elsa rises and brushes off her white stockings. Frieda is much troubled by the conversation, but tries to throw it off.*) I wonder what's keeping Hartwig so long.

ELSA. He probably had to wait. There has been a big crowd down there every day getting their passports viséed.

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FRIEDA. Yes, so many of my people are going. (*She catches herself and forces a gay note into her voice.*)

It will be nice to have friends on board.

ELSA (*encouragingly*). And you can play pinochle with Frau Hammer.

FRIEDA. Yes. And Friday nights Herr Hammer can make Shabbos. It won't be like being away from home at all. (*She sews rapidly to keep from breaking down.*) Elsa, I want you to promise me that while I'm in America you'll work hard and get ahead with your studies so that . . . (*Her voice catches.*) by the time I come back you'll . . .

ELSA. I'll do everything I can to make you proud of me. I promise. So will Hartwig.

FRIEDA. I'm proud of him now. Why, just the other day Herr Folger told me he had never had so clever an apprentice. (*Thinks.*) I hope Hartwig stays with him for years and years. He might develop into a great goldsmith, a real artist like Leonardo da Vinci used to be or . . . (*Abruptly she rises and walks to the window.*) If Hartwig doesn't come soon he'll be late for the picnic. What time are the boys coming for him?

ELSA. At two.

FRIEDA. I shouldn't have sent him to the Rathaus. I should have gone myself.

[*She watches for him out the window. As she stands there, the sound of hammering is heard outside.*]

ELSA (*leaving her packing*). I'll run next door and see if your shoes are ready.

FRIEDA. Thanks, dear. And bring some apples for Hartwig to take with him.

ELSA (*starts, then stops near the window*). What's the hammering?

FRIEDA. Nothing, dear.

ELSA (*looking out*). Oh! The Nazi are putting a sign on Levinski's shop.

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FRIEDA (*looking out*). Yes, a boycott! Herr Gott!
Will they never stop!

ELSA. I suppose we'll be the next.

FRIEDA. Oh, no. They know I'm going away, and they wouldn't do that to Frau Hahn. You see, it's really a very good thing she is taking over the shop. Yes, everything is working out for the best. (*Then abruptly.*) Run along, child. Get the apples for Hartwig.

ELSA. Yes, Aunt Frieda. (*Elsa goes. As she reaches the outer room, the sound is heard of a door opening and closing. Her voice is heard off stage.*) Thought you'd gone to America! You've been an age!

HARTWIG (*off stage*). Terrible crowd there.

[*Hartwig enters. He is a boy of eighteen, tall, strong, blond, good looking. At present he is very much down-cast.*]

FRIEDA (*as Hartwig enters*). Well! I'm glad you're back. I was worried for fear the boys would come and you'd be late for the picnic. Better hurry and wash up a little. (*Hartwig is crossing the room very slowly, the picture of desolation, his head low, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.*) Did you have any trouble with my visé? (*She watches him, and senses that something is wrong.*) What's wrong, Hartwig?
[*She crosses to him.*]

HARTWIG. Nothing.

FRIEDA. But there is. (*She tries to force a smile.*) You can't fool me. I've known you too long. Anything go wrong at the shop? (*No answer.*) Something did. You haven't done anything to displease Herr Folger, have you?

HARTWIG (*turning to her, still disconsolate*). Yes, and no. (*Drops into a chair.*) That is, nothing I can help. (*Pause.*) I'd rather not talk about it, if you don't mind.

FRIEDA. But I do mind. Remember, I'm going away to-

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morrow and I can't go with anything on my mind, troubling me. You'd better tell me, dear.

HARTWIG. Well, if you must know, I've lost my job.

FRIEDA (*aghast*). You've . . . ? No, it isn't possible.

Why, only the other day Herr Folger told me . . .

HARTWIG. I know. It has nothing to do with him. He can't help it, and it's no fault of mine. It's a new edict, that's all.

FRIEDA. I see! More persecution! (*Pause.*) But you're not a Jew! (*He glances up swiftly, not wishing to hurt her but hoping she will understand. She does.*)

It's because you are living in the same house with one.

Is that it? Tell me, Hartwig. You *must* tell me.

HARTWIG. Oh, don't ask me, Aunt Frieda.

FRIEDA. That's it. Of course that's it. But darling, why didn't you tell them that your Aunt Frieda wouldn't be in your way much longer? Why didn't you tell them that I'm sailing the day after tomorrow, and that I'm leaving for good?

HARTWIG (*loath to say what he must*). You're not leaving, Aunt Frieda.

FRIEDA. I'm not leav . . .

[*She pauses, dumbfounded. He shakes his head.*]

HARTWIG. They are not issuing any more visés to Jews.

(*He tries to smile.*) I'm sorry if you're disappointed.

But I'm glad, really I am. It means you will stay right here with us.

FRIEDA. It's impossible. You can't mean what you're saying. I'm not to go . . . they won't let me . . .

HARTWIG (*putting an arm around her affectionately*).

You're staying right here with us. Now, tell the truth, aren't you glad, honestly?

FRIEDA (*letting herself go, almost gayly*). Yes. Yes.

I didn't want to go away. I just thought it was best.

But now they won't let me. (*Suddenly her mood changes. She moves away from the boy.*) But no.

AUF WIEDERSEHN

It's impossible for me to stay with you two children. Can't you see what it would do? Through me, you've even lost your job. But I can send you to live with someone else, then you'll be all right. Herr Folger would give you back your job then.

HARTWIG. He can't, unless I join the Nazi.

FRIEDA. Oh!

HARTWIG. Of course I can't do that. But I'm all mixed up. I don't know what to do. All the boys belong. Johann has been made a captain. He keeps at me to join.

FRIEDA. I see.

HARTWIG. Honest, Aunt Frieda, I don't know. I love Germany just as much as they do. I want to see her on her feet again, fine, strong, proud as we used to be.

FRIEDA. But darling, it's not the Jews who are hurting Germany.

HARTWIG. Of course it's not Jews like you, Aunt Frieda, but most of them aren't like you. They are like Levinski, and Grunebaum, and . . . you haven't been listening, as I have, to the speeches at the meetings . . .

FRIEDA. So you've been going to the meetings?

HARTWIG. Yes.

FRIEDA. I see. And you'd join if it weren't for me, wouldn't you? (*As he does not answer, she asks with more insistence.*) Wouldn't you?

HARTWIG. Well, maybe. I've got to think of my future, and of Elsa's. Somehow I've got to get work; and you know as well as I do there is only one way I can get it. (*Comes closer to her.*) Don't feel bad about it. I don't want to hurt you, but . . .

FRIEDA. I'm not hurt. I understand. You'll join the Nazi. Of course, you'll have to join.

HARTWIG. No, I won't. I'll stick to you, Aunt Frieda, honest. I was just thinking about it.

[*The clock strikes two.*

AUF WIEDERSEHN

FRIEDA (*pretending to toss the whole thing off*). The boys will be here any minute. You'll find a box of lunch all done up, on top of the ice box.

HARTWIG. Great! (*Rises.*) Did you put in some of your apfelkuchen?

FRIEDA. Yes, a whole one.

[*Hartwig starts for the door. Outside, a street commotion is heard. Hartwig turns back and steps to the window.*]

HARTWIG. There's a crowd gathering outside of Levinski's. Wonder what's going on!

FRIEDA. Possibly he is objecting to the boycott sign they put on his place.

HARTWIG. Pretty dangerous to object to anything the Nazi do.

FRIEDA (*half to herself*). Yes.

[*Elsa enters with a pair of shoes wrapped in a newspaper.*]

ELSA. There's an awful crowd outside. I could hardly get through. (*Hands package to Frieda.*) Here are your shoes, Aunt Frieda.

FRIEDA. Thanks, dear. And the apples for Hartwig? Did you forget them?

ELSA (*confused, on the verge of tears*). No, I didn't forget.

[*The noise from the street grows louder. Hartwig enters with his lunch neatly done up in a newspaper.*]

HARTWIG. What's going on out there?

ELSA. A row over at Levinski's. A fight, I think. His son sort of went out of his head when they nailed the sign on the shop, and he resisted the soldiers. They are taking him away.

FRIEDA. Oh, God! Those poor people! My people!

ELSA. Don't worry, Aunt Frieda. You'll be away from all this soon. Day after tomorrow . . .

HARTWIG. Aunt Frieda isn't going.

FRIEDA (*quickly*). No. I, I've changed my mind.

AUF WIEDERSEHN

ELSA. You're going to stay with us? Oh, I'm so glad. I would have missed you terribly.

HARTWIG (*at the window*). I'll take a run over there and see what's going on. Tell the boys where I am. They can pick me up there.

[*He takes his lunch and starts out.*]

ELSA (*haltingly*). Oh, Hartwig, I was going to tell you, the boys have gone.

HARTWIG. What do you mean? It's only just two.

ELSA. They have gone.

HARTWIG. Without calling for me?

ELSA. Yes. They passed me as I came in.

HARTWIG. That's funny. Well, I'll go and meet them.

ELSA. They don't want you.

HARTWIG. What do you mean? They don't want me?

ELSA (*haltingly*). They said to tell you . . . they were sorry . . . but it was getting too dangerous to be seen with . . .

FRIEDA (*quietly*). With people who associate with Jews.

ELSA (*bursting out crying*). Yes, that's it.

[*She flings herself in Frieda's arms, sobbing.*]

FRIEDA (*holding her close and cradling her, while Hartwig throws down his package of lunch*). Don't cry, Elsa, don't. You break Aunt Frieda's heart. I'm just beginning to realize all that I've done to you, that I *will* do to you. Hartwig has lost his job, and his friends; that's why Johann and the other boys haven't been here lately, all because of me. But Frieda mustn't stand in your way. Don't cry, darling. We'll find some way out. I'll tell you; you can both go live with Frau Hahn. She'll take you. Then everything will be all right.

ELSA (*clinging to her*). And leave you here alone?

HARTWIG (*heatedly*). We couldn't do that. If you were here without us, then it *would* be hard on you. They'd boycott the shop; you couldn't make a living;

AUF WIEDERSEHN

you'd starve, and we couldn't stand that. We'd come back to help you, and then the Nazi . . .

FRIEDA. Oh, darling, stop. Stop! Don't talk about it.

I must think it all over. There must be some way out.

[The noise from the street increases. Hartwig rushes to the window to watch.]

HARTWIG. Look! They're breaking in the front of Levinski's store. They're ruining the place.

[There is the sound of shattered glass, and noise of the crowd.]

FRIEDA. Trouble, more trouble! God help my people!

[Hartwig starts from the window to the door.]

ELSA. Don't go. Stay here with us. I'm frightened.

HARTWIG *(turning back)*. Nothing will happen as long as we mind our own business.

ELSA. But I'm afraid . . .

[The door bursts open unceremoniously. Levinski, dirty and disheveled, stands there, a gun in his hand. He is an old man with a grey beard. Now he is almost hysterical with excitement and fear. He comes in quickly, closing the door behind him and turning the key in the lock.]

FRIEDA. Herr Levinski!

LEVINSKI. Quick, hide me some place! They are after me! I shot at a soldier. He laid his hands on my wife! *(He looks about him dazed, mumbling.)* They took my boy away . . .

HARTWIG. You shouldn't come in here. You'll get us into trouble.

LEVINSKI. No one saw me. I slipped through the crowd. They are looking for me down the street.

ELSA. You mustn't stay here!

LEVINSKI *(to Frieda)*. My friend, help one of your people!

FRIEDA. But what can I . . .

[Knocking is heard on the door.]

LEVINSKI. That's the soldiers. They've found me.

AUF WIEDERSEHN

FRIEDA. You children mustn't be in this. Go quickly, out over the roof. You can get to Frau Hahn's. Stay there . . . until I come for you. Run. Hurry.

[Elsa takes Hartwig by the hand and tries to drag him away, but he will not go.]

HARTWIG (to Frieda). I'm not going to leave you in this trouble.

FRIEDA (frantically). You must. You must get Elsa out of here.

[Knocking is repeated.]

FRIEDA. I'll be all right. It will be easier without you. Go, please.

HARTWIG (taking Elsa by the hand). All right. I'll take Elsa to Frau Hahn's, and come right back to you.

FRIEDA. Yes, that's right. Do.

[Elsa and Hartwig go.]

LEVINSKI (pleading hysterically). You won't give me up? They'll shoot me like a dog . . . and my Lena, and my children . . .

FRIEDA. No. No. I'll help you.

[Knocking is repeated.]

JOHANN (outside door). Open in the name of the law.

LEVINSKI. What shall I do?

FRIEDA. Here, you mustn't be found with a gun. Give it to me.

[She takes the gun, looks about her hurriedly, and then hides it under some clothing in one of the bags on the table.]

JOHANN (outside). Open!

FRIEDA. And now, try the roof. You may get away. *(She goes to the door, and Levinski leaves. Then she pretends to be fumbling with the key in the lock.)* I am trying to open the door, but the key has stuck.

JOHANN (outside). Open, or we break down the door.

FRIEDA (throwing open the door). There!

[Johann, a Captain, and a soldier, both dressed in Nazi uniform, enter.]

AUF WIEDERSEHN

FRIEDA (*trying to be light*). You frightened me so I couldn't get the key to work. (*Then, recognizing Johann.*) Oh, Johann, it's you!

JOHANN (*also surprised*). Frau Neuberg! I, I came in in such a hurry I didn't realize this was your house.

FRIEDA. Yes.

JOHANN (*changing his tone*). Well, I'm a Captain now. Where is he?

FRIEDA. Who?

JOHANN. That Jew.

FRIEDA (*wishing to gain time*). If you mean my Hartwig, you know as well as I that he is not a Jew.

JOHANN. I mean that old man who shot at one of our soldiers. He's here and we know it.

FRIEDA (*looking about her*). No one is here.

JOHANN (*also looking about*). We'll soon see. Search the rest of the place.

[*The soldier goes out.*]

FRIEDA. How strange it seems to see you in that uniform, unkind, unfriendly towards me.

JOHANN. I'm sorry, but I have my duty to perform.

FRIEDA. Of course. It is strange. When I think of the times you and Hartwig used to play together, sleep in the same bed, wake me up at daybreak to get your breakfast so you could go fishing, beg for cookies out of my old Meissen jar . . . I can't believe that you are here, standing stiff and unfriendly before me, ready to act against me and my people.

JOHANN (*uncomfortably*). Conditions have changed.

FRIEDA. But you haven't changed, and I haven't changed. We're still the same people. Must we be enemies?

JOHANN. That remains to be seen.

SOLDIER (*returning*). Excuse me, Herr Captain, but we got him. He was hiding in the next room. When I entered he tried to escape, and one of the soldiers shot him. He is dead.

AUF WIEDERSEHN

FRIEDA (*stifling a cry*). Oh!

JOHANN. That's all, then. You may go.

[*The soldier goes.*]

FRIEDA (*her face in her hands*). Oh! That poor old man . . . and for no reason, dead!

JOHANN. And you, Frau Neuberg, I'm sorry to inform you, are under arrest.

FRIEDA. What!

JOHANN. For sheltering a fugitive from justice.

FRIEDA. I didn't know he was there. I told him to go out over the roof.

JOHANN. It's one and the same thing. You were aiding him in his escape.

FRIEDA. And why shouldn't I? He'd done nothing wrong. He was only defending his family. Wouldn't you have helped him if you had been in my place?

JOHANN (*stiffly*). That I cannot say. I am not a Jew.

FRIEDA. And what difference does that make? Oh, why are you all so hard on us? What have we done to deserve the treatment we are getting. I love Germany just as you do. I'm just as much a part of the Fatherland. I've lived here all my life, and my father before me, and my grandfather before him. We've all loved Germany. We've all sacrificed for her. In the war I gave my beloved man, just as the Gentile women gave theirs. We all gave, just as Christians gave. We fought and bled and suffered exactly as they. After the war we pinched and scraped and paid our taxes, Christian and Jew alike, gladly, for the good of the Fatherland. And now, that there is no war and you don't need fodder for your cannon, you turn on us and say we are not Germans, we are different! But look out. The years are long. And much may happen. Germany may yet cringe on her knees, and beg the Jews for their money and for the life blood of their sons!

AUF WIEDERSEHN

JOHANN (*stern and angry*). Quiet! All you say will only make it worse for you. Get your things. Come with me.

FRIEDA. You're not going to take me away?

JOHANN. I must.

FRIEDA. Oh, but you can't. What will they do with me?

JOHANN. That I cannot say.

FRIEDA. I will be tried for treason?

JOHANN. Yes.

FRIEDA. Then I know what that means: conviction. Oh, but it mustn't be. Don't you see what that would mean for the children, for Elsa and Hartwig, to have been living with a Jew who is convicted of treason? It will mean disgrace for them. They will be outcasts.

JOHANN. Yes.

FRIEDA. Then you can't take me away. For their sake, let me stay here.

JOHANN. I'm afraid I . . .

FRIEDA. Oh, please! You've known me a long time; you know I won't do any harm, I won't cause any trouble. And you've known Elsa and Hartwig all their lives. You've been Hartwig's best friend, until recently. Think of all the good times you've had together, all that you've meant to each other. And think of Hartwig: what this will mean to him; he won't have a chance. But if you do nothing about all this, Hartwig will join the Nazi, he'll . . .

JOHANN. He has refused.

FRIEDA. But he wants to join, and he will. I'll see that he joins.

JOHANN. But he couldn't be a Nazi, with you . . . here in the house.

FRIEDA. Oh, no, no; that's right, of course.

JOHANN (*sincerely*). I'm sorry, Frau Neuberg, truly I am. But if you're thinking of Hartwig, don't you see it would be much worse for you to stay on here than to go with me?



AUF WIEDERSEHN

FRIEDA (*realizing all that he means*). Yes, yes, I suppose it would be. But there must be something I can do, some way out. There must be. (*She is standing near the table on which is the bag where she hid the gun. She drops her hand on the open bag for support and feels the gun there. She reacts to it and suddenly sees the solution to her problem.*) Yes, yes. There's always some way out.

JOHANN. But how?

FRIEDA. Listen to me. I've thought of something. Suppose I were to go away, far away . . .

JOHANN. They're not issuing any more visés.

FRIEDA. I won't need a visé. But I'll go, I promise you, where neither you nor Elsa nor Hartwig will ever see me or hear of me again.

JOHANN. Where will you go?

FRIEDA. Don't ask me that. But I give you my word. If you'll leave me now, before the children come back, I'll go . . . and not return.

JOHANN. But . . .

FRIEDA. Say that you will, I beg of you. Give Hartwig and Elsa their chance.

JOHANN. But Frau Neuberg, where *can* you go?

FRIEDA (*looking at him with meaning*). Johann, one can go where one does not return.

JOHANN (*understanding*). Oh!

FRIEDA. Please, let me. What harm can it do? You will have accomplished your purpose. You will have one more Nazi in your ranks, and one less Jew.

JOHANN. I see. Very well, Frau Neuberg, since you ask it. I will go back to headquarters, and report nothing.

FRIEDA. God bless you! And I give you my word, as a Jew, when you come back in the morning I'll not be here. (*She holds out her hand, which he takes.*)

And now, go. I . . . I have some things to do first.

JOHANN (*still holding her hand*). I will. But first I want to say I think Elsa and Hartwig have been blessed

AUF WIEDERSEHN

. . . to have you. Auf wiedersehn, Frau Neuberg.
FRIEDA. Auf wiedersehn. (*Johann goes.*) Auf wiedersehn.

[Tears come to her eyes, but she brushes them away. She takes the gun out of the bag, looks at it, lays it on the table, looks around the room, picks up Hartwig's luncheon, looks at it, lays it on a table, goes to Elsa's dress, takes the last stitch in it, presses it to her breast and puts it on a hanger. Then she goes back to the table, picks up the gun, looks at it, looks around the room once more, saying again, "Auf wiedersehn." Then, with the gun in her hand, she goes quickly off stage. A second later a shot is heard, and the curtain falls.]

**TEA-TIME FOR
SHELLEY'S FAUN**

**By
DELIA VANDEUSEN**

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CAST

A LADY, *an attractive woman in her forties, or early fifties.*

THE FAUN, *a young man, dark and heavy browed, his hair arranged to suggest two small horns.*

DAPHNE, *the Lady's daughter.*

GRACIE

KAY

BILL

DICK

JIM

} *Daphne's friends.*

The scene is a garden in midsummer.

The time is the present.

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To the right, French windows open upon a flagged terrace, with deck chairs, an iron and tile table, and other attractive outdoor furniture. The rest of the stage is lawn, with a low wall running across the back. Shrubs and trees, a suggestion of more garden, show beyond the wall, which is fronted by a flower border, and broken at center rear by a rustic gate. The light is just softening from mid-day glare to afternoon tranquility, and the whole atmosphere is peaceful and homelike. Moving slowly down the border, cutting a flower here and there is a lady of . . . well, why try to guess her age? She is not old, but it is safe to say that she made her début not later than 1910, and she is sufficiently anachronistic to show herself at first glance for what she is: a lady. She hums contentedly as she moves, until the audience has ceased its first rustlings, which is the cue for the entrance of her daughter, Daphne, who bounds through the French windows, clad in shorts and something resembling a halter.

LADY. Oh, hello, dear. Have they all arrived?

DAPHNE. They're changing into beach clothes, then we're coming out here for awhile before we start.

LADY (*hurriedly*). I won't be long, dear. I was just getting a few more flowers for the dinner table.

DAPHNE. Oh, that's all right. They won't be out for quite awhile. But listen, mother, don't fuss over the decorations. It won't make any difference if we don't have any. Besides, we'll probably be awfully late.

LADY (*resignedly*). I suppose you will; you're all so casual. But do try to get here within an hour of the time, anyway. Your father . . .

DAPHNE. Now, mother, be reasonable!

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LADY. Really, I would be glad to have you late, if it meant that you didn't drive too fast to get here on time. You will tell the boys to be careful, won't you?

DAPHNE (*hugging her mother*). Now, mums, don't go sissy on me!

LADY (*bracing herself and trying to play up*). I do try to be sensible, darling; you know I do, but I can't help worrying when you're out late in cars.

DAPHNE. Don't worry when Bill is driving. Bill's a swell driver.

LADY. But he drives so fast! Daphne, promise me you'll try to make him drive slower. Around forty miles an hour. Nobody could object to that.

DAPHNE. I'll say nobody could!

LADY (*firmly*). Now, Daphne, if you don't ask him, I will. I shall stay right here and speak to him when he comes out.

DAPHNE (*rather crossly*). Oh, all right. I promise to tell him you said to drive slower. Anything, rather than have you make an exhibition of yourself.

LADY (*hurt*). Really, Daphne, if your father knew you spoke to me like that, I'm afraid he wouldn't let you use the car at all.

DAPHNE (*punctuating her words with hugs, and a kiss or two*). But he won't know, because you're too good a little sport to tell him.

LADY (*laughing and giving Daphne a little push*). Now, don't try to get around me with your blarney!

[*But it is apparent that Daphne has already done so.*]

DAPHNE. Well, I'll go in now and arrange the canapes.

LADY (*attempting firmness*). Now, Daphne, listen to me: no more gin in those cocktails. Your father mixed them before he left, and all you have to do is put in the ice.

DAPHNE (*sadly*). Yeah, and if they're like the orange-ades he mixed last time, they're lousy. But I suppose he locked up the gin.

LADY. He certainly did.

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DAPHNE (*with a gesture of resignation*). That would seem to be that. So long, mums.

[*She disappears through the French windows. The Lady, looking somewhat less tranquil, resumes her flower cutting but not her humming. As she moves about, the Faun's head is observable by the audience, peering over the wall at different points and finally through the gate, advancing and retreating timidly, like a shy wild thing. Finally, overcoming his fear, he leaps through the gate, landing with a bound in the center of the stage. He is somewhat sketchily clad in a leopard skin, and carries a set of pipes on the Pan model. While he has no actual horns, his hair grows into two goat-like bumps over heavy black eyebrows. His skin is golden tan, and he moves with a lithe, animal grace, to which is added a certain air of ingenuous conceit. The Lady turns, startled.*

LADY. Gracious! How you startled me!

[*But somehow, she does not look as astonished as we might expect and the Faun seems to find something lacking in her response, for he strikes an attitude.*

LADY (*laughing*). You do that very well, for one of your generation. You look almost like a favorite actor of mine.

FAUN. Who is he?

LADY. You wouldn't remember him; the play was long before your time.

FAUN. Play? What play?

LADY. Why, "The Faun."

FAUN (*delightedly*). You know me, then?

LADY (*laughing again*). You are a clever boy. You should go on the stage. But maybe you are on the stage. What is your name?

FAUN (*slightly dashed*). Name? Why, I thought you knew me. I have no name. I am a faun, Shelley's faun — if that means anything to you.

LADY. Yes, that was in the play, too, or something like it.

FAUN. Play? What play?

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LADY (*a little impatiently*). I just told you. Haven't you been acting the part?

FAUN (*strutting*). I never act a part. I am what I am, always. I am a faun.

[*He skips.*]

LADY. But aren't you one of the boys in the houseparty?

FAUN (*contemptuously*). A boy? The gods forbid! No, I tell you; I am a faun.

LADY (*pursuing her own idea*). Then you must be from the village. Did Daphne invite you?

FAUN (*joyously*). Daphne! A nymph's name! Are there nymphs hereabouts?

LADY (*beginning to be annoyed*). Daphne is my daughter, as you probably know. Did you come to see her?

FAUN. Perhaps, perhaps. I came to dance with young life again. Is Daphne beautiful?

LADY (*bridling proudly, as the best of parents will*). Well, naturally I think so, but . . .

FAUN. Then I'll dance with her!

[*Executes a classic skip or two.*]

LADY (*laughing against her will*). Probably. Lots of boys do. But I wish you'd be serious for a moment.

You almost convince me that you *are* a faun.

FAUN. Must I tell you again that I am?

LADY (*wide-eyed, a little frightened and beginning to be convinced*). But . . . but . . . Oh, it can't be! Am I going mad?

FAUN (*soothingly*). Don't be frightened. Of course you aren't mad. Mortals sometimes think so when first they see me, but I reassure them, poor creatures. Shelley recognized me at sight. That is why I loved him.

[*Muses, rather sadly.*]

LADY. Shelley? But he lived a hundred years ago. He died in 18 . . . Let me see. I'm not very good at dates.

FAUN (*sadly*). Yes, he died. He left me. That is the sadness of being immortal. Nothing else lasts.

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LADY (*with gentle sentiment*). Nothing lasts but love.

FAUN. Not even love. Love dies, too.

LADY. You're speaking of pagan love.

FAUN. It's the only kind I know.

LADY (*tolerantly*). Well, even that side of love has its place. I learned that from the play.

FAUN. See here, you've been talking and talking about a play. Suppose you explain.

LADY. Why, it's just that when I was a young girl, I saw a play called "The Faun." The part was played by a *matinée* idol of the period. (*Reminiscently.*) He was wonderful.

FAUN. An idol? How could an idol play a part? They're made of stone.

LADY. Don't be silly. Of course, he wasn't really an idol. People called him that because he was popular.

FAUN. I see. What did he do in the play, this idol?

LADY. Why, really, almost what you did just now. The first scene had a terrace with shrubbery, I remember; and the Faun came bounding into a household of very stiff, conventional people and completely revolutionized everything before he left.

FAUN. Ah, yes. Just what did he do? Shelley used to talk of revolution, but I never quite understood. When he began it, I used to lead him off to the sea or into a deserted cypress garden or . . . (*Sighs.*) Go on about the play. How did the Faun revolutionize?

LADY. Well, you see, he comes bounding over the railing . . .

FAUN (*impatiently*). You told me that.

LADY. Oh, dear, you sound just like my husband. Really, you know, I can't keep the thread if you keep interrupting and going back to Shelley.

FAUN (*shocked*). Don't you want to hear about Shelley?

LADY. Of course. But I thought you wanted to hear about the play.

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FAUN. I do, I do; but start this time *after* the bound to the terrace.

LADY. In a leopard skin just like yours. (*Falters.*) I'm, I'm not quite sure what happens next. You see, it's a good many years. But someone persuades the Faun to wear a dress suit and let himself be introduced as an Italian prince.

FAUN (*with a bounce of alarm*). I won't do it. I tell you, I won't do it!

LADY. Yes, that's just what he said, at first.

FAUN. Well, you'll never get *me* . . .

LADY. Who ever said I wanted to? Besides, nobody wears dress suits at the seashore in summer. You're much more properly dressed as you are. Do you want to hear about this play, or don't you?

FAUN (*gallant at once*). I do, dear lady. Go on.
[*Kisses her hand.*]

LADY (*mollified, but somewhat flustered*). Well, in the houseparty is a young girl whose designing mother is trying to marry her to a rich man, whom she doesn't love. And there is a handsome young man . . .

FAUN. And, of course, she loves him.

LADY. No, that's the whole point of the play. She doesn't love anyone. She's absolutely frigid and icy, like someone in a dream.

FAUN. An uninteresting personality. But what happens to her?

LADY (*confidentially*). In the last act, she and the Faun are caught out in a thunderstorm, and when they return . . . well, she's like a different person. (*The Faun bursts out laughing.*) Oh, I know what you're thinking. But I'm sure nothing, nothing like *that* occurred. (*Her voice trails off. The Faun still laughs, incredulous, and a bit boastful.*) Of course, the Faun had opened the girl's eyes to the . . . the pagan side of love we were speaking of, so that she had the courage to defy

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her terrible mother and marry the young man. But it was all symbolic. The . . . the action of the play showed that he behaved like a perfect gentleman.

FAUN. A gentleman faun! Ho, ho, ho!

LADY (*pleadingly*). Ah, don't laugh, don't spoil it for me. You see, *I* was like that girl, shy and awkward and afraid of love, and (*Impressively*.) that play changed my whole life. It made me see how foolish it was to be too conventional.

FAUN. I see. So you cast aside convention?

LADY. Oh, not altogether, of course. But I . . . became more alive; I lost my fear of life. Why, without that play, I don't believe I should ever have had the courage to marry.

FAUN. So you married?

LADY (*indignantly*). Didn't I tell you I have a daughter?

FAUN. Daphne. To be sure. And is Daphne conventional, afraid of life and love?

LADY. Not as I was. (*Proudly, but with a certain bitterness.*) Young people aren't brought up that way now. My generation has seen to that.

FAUN. You don't seem very happy about it.

LADY. Oh, I am, but . . . It's all very fine and healthy and all that, but sometimes, lately, I have had a feeling that Daphne is missing something she ought to have from life.

FAUN. Love?

LADY. I don't know; I really don't know. I can't seem to discuss these things with her. But it's as though, in spite of all her freedom and gayety which I never had, she lacks something that I possessed.

FAUN. No faun in her life, eh?

LADY (*admiringly*). How cleverly you put things! You know, I wish Daphne could meet you. (*Voices are heard inside the house.*) Here she comes now with her friends. They are going down to the beach. I'll tell you what!

TEA-TIME FOR SHELLEY'S FAUN

Let me introduce you, and you can join them. Like the play!

FAUN (*firmly*). No dress suits!

LADY (*laughing*). Certainly not. When you see how our young people *don't* dress, you'll realize what strides we have made. You'll feel quite suitable.

[*As the voices draw nearer, the Faun has another idea.*]

FAUN. I'll tell you what! Let me hide and leap at them. That will be even more like your play. Besides (*Childishly*.) I like to see people jump.

LADY (*admiringly*). How playful you are! But that's a very good idea. I'll go in through the other door, so as not to meet them. I'm so excited I might give you away. (*She goes out through the gate, then turns. Rather wistfully.*) Good-bye, Faun.

FAUN. Good-bye.

LADY. Don't . . . don't carry the joke too far, will you?

FAUN (*with some compunction*). Don't be afraid. Never be afraid. I won't harm your Daphne.

[*The Lady beams, waves her hand, and goes. The Faun casts quickly about and hides behind a shrub, as six young people, clad informally in shorts, bathing suits, and beach robes, troop out upon the terrace. Dick carries the cocktail shaker, Kay the tray of canapes.*]

DAPHNE. Put them here. Wait, I'll clear off the junk. (*Sweeps flowers, books, and a bag of knitting to one side of the tile table in a jumble.*) Good thing you had that flask with you, Bill. Daddy tried to do me dirt on the gin again.

GRACIE (*little and self-consciously "cute"*). Matches, matches, who's got the matches?

DICK (*shaking cocktails*). Here, Jim, give the little girl a big light.

JIM (*to Gracie, after an unsuccessful attempt*). Well, breathe in, baby, breathe in!

KAY (*producing a cigarette*). Hold it, hold it!

[*Jim lights cigarettes for both girls.*]

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DICK (*pouring out cocktails*). Well, boys and girls, as my dad likes to say, "Come and get it!"

[*The Faun, who has been bobbing impatiently in and out of the shrub, thinks this is a good time, and bounding to the center of the stage, strikes a Russian ballet attitude.*]

FAUN. Hola!

DICK. Well, look what's dropped in!

FAUN. Yes. Do you know who I am? I am . . .

DICK. Now, don't tell me! Let me guess!

KAY (*with mock excitement*). I know, I know! It's Mrs. ——— *!

[*They all scream with laughter.*]

FAUN (*taken aback*). I don't know what you mean.

I am a faun.

KAY. A which?

BILL. A fawn, darling. Just a little dear!

[*He makes an offensively effeminate gesture, which even the Faun comprehends. He draws himself up with offended dignity.*]

FAUN. Which of you is Daphne?

DAPHNE. I am. Why?

FAUN. Your mother told me . . .

DAPHNE. It must be one of mother's lame ducks from the village. Lay off him, boys, for goodness' sake!

BILL (*with a wave of the hands*). O.K., if you say so.

DICK (*with an attempt at cordiality*). Have a drink, Faun?

[*The Faun accepts a cocktail, sips, makes a wry face, but politely tries to hide it and drains the glass.*]

FAUN. What wine is this?

DICK. Wine? He thinks this is wine. (*Laughter.*)

Say, boy, where you been?

FAUN (*puzzled*). Why . . . in Italy.

JIM. Italy! That explains the salute. He's a Fascist that's lost his shirt.

* Insert the name of a lady prominent in the press at the time.

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GRACIE. Well, I think his little sun suit is cute, anyway.

FAUN. I do not know what a Fascist is, but I am not one.

I'm a faun, Shelley's faun.

GRACIE. Who's Shelley?

KAY. Dumb-bell! That's the bird in English lit. Did you think it was somebody's pet lobster? Jim, you tell her about Shelley. You ought to know; you're Phi Beta Kappa.

JIM (*seeming to resent the distinction*). Sure, I know about Shelley. So what?

FAUN. Ah, you know my Shelley? But I can tell you things of Shelley that no mortal ever knew. (*Falls into a sort of chant.*)

I walked with Shelley through the olive groves,
I sang with Shelley by the whispering sea,
We trod the vineyards, climbed the purple hills,
We . . .

JIM (*bored*). Oh, can the iambs!

THE OTHERS (*in chorus*). Skip it. Skip it.

FAUN (*beginning to feel his cocktail*). Skip it! A good thought.

[*He pipes and dances, classically pastoral.*]

GRACIE. Hey, that routine went out with the gavotte.

Here, play something with a little hotcha; I'll show you.

[*She leaps to her feet, and tries to tap dance to the Faun's piping.*]

BILL. Atta girl, Gracie; you show him. Give her St. Louis blues, big boy.

FAUN. Blues? I'm afraid I don't understand.

BILL. Well, play whatever you got and she'll dance it. That baby's got rhythm.

FAUN. You mean she'll dance to my piping? Good!

[*He pipes; Gracie dances a few steps and then stops.*]

GRACIE (*goodnatured, but firm*). Now, Italy! Keep time.

JIM. He can't play. Let Dick do it. Got your harmonica, Dick?

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DICK. Have I got my harmonica; have I got my head?
All right, Gracie; go to town.

[*Dick plays a tap dance for Gracie, who does, indeed, go to town. The Faun looks on in wonderment for a minute, then tries to join her, with poor success.*

JIM (*impatiently*). Oh, sit down!

BILL (*enthusiastically*). Is that girl good! Has she got what it takes!

[*The Faun, neglected, tries another cocktail and watches the dance. The second drink takes quicker effect than the first. He begins to like the tap dance.*

FAUN (*chanting ecstatically*). This is the new age, the beautiful, new, pagan age!

[*He skips wildly, leaps about picturesquely, and finally with a bound, catches Gracie in his arms and appears about to run off with her.*

GRACIE. Hey, you big bum; let me go!

[*Dick drops the harmonica, jumps up and snatches Gracie from the Faun. They glare at each other.*

DICK (*menacingly*). Cave man, eh? Well, lay off Gracie, because if you don't, I'm going to slap you down so hard you'll bounce back.

FAUN (*puzzled, but defiant.*) Slap me down? (*Dick grabs his arm.*) Here, let me go. Oaf! Slave!

[*An impromptu and decidedly unscientific boxing match takes place, in which the Faun is downed repeatedly. Daphne manages to intervene.*

DAPHNE. Boys! Have a heart! Do you want mother out here? We'll get the car taken away from us.

[*The threat quiets Dick, who casts an apprehensive look toward the house and releases the Faun.*

FAUN (*breathing quickly*). You misunderstood me. I meant no harm to the maiden.

DICK (*rather sulkily*). 'Pology accepted. How about you, Gracie?

GRACIE (*graciously*). O.K. by me.

DICK (*jealously*). I believe you *like* the guy.

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GRACIE (*snuggling up to Dick, but ogling the Faun*).

Well, I do think his ears are like Warner Gable's.

[*The Faun is feeling tenderly of his eye.*]

DICK. Say, I mussed you up some, didn't I? You ought to know better than to lead with your right like that. You lay yourself open every time.

[*Starts to demonstrate.*]

BILL. Oh, skip it, Dick. He can't box, but he sure can take it. He kept coming right in for more.

DAPHNE. It's getting late. Let's push off while we can go on our own power. Besides (*Slightly prim.*) we mustn't drive fast. Mother was giving me the devil for going over forty, just before you came out.

[*Laughter.*]

DICK. Good Lord! Hold Bill down to forty and he's dangerous . . . likely to kill the engine.

FAUN (*bewildered*). Forty? Forty what?

KAY. Gee, what kind of a line are you trying to pull? Forty miles. What did you think?

FAUN (*still bewildered*). I . . . I guess I didn't think.

KAY. I guess you didn't, too. And don't ever try it. You might sprain something.

BILL (*aside to Daphne*). Listen, Daff, can't we shake him?

DAPHNE. We-ll, if he's one of mother's lame ducks . . . (*Bill looks annoyed and she changes suddenly.*) Oh, don't be like that! Yes, we can. Watch me closely, darling. (*She approaches the Faun.*) Look here, are you a strong swimmer? Because we're going to the surf beach and unless you . . .

FAUN. Swimmer? I, I don't know. I never swim. I dance on the beach and pipe to the mermaids. Sometimes they come ashore and then . . .

DAPHNE (*annoyed*). Can't you lay off that idiotic line of yours? Act your age. Can you swim or can't you? Because if you're just going to get banged around by the waves . . .

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FAUN (*feeling of his eye again*). Banged around? No, no, I don't think . . . no, I was just leaving.

[*He makes a sudden leap over the wall and disappears.*]

BILL. Well, can you tie that!

DAPHNE. Mother certainly can pick 'em! I'll probably catch hell, but . . .

[*Shrugs eloquently. The others troop off, leaving Bill and Daphne alone for a moment.*]

DAPHNE. Well, am I good, or am I good?

BILL. Kid, you're good.

DAPHNE. Do I get rewarded?

BILL. You get rewarded.

[*He kisses her; Daphne responding with ardor. The Faun's head shows above the wall, as he watches them. They go out together, and the Faun steals cautiously in through the gate, just as the Lady reënters.*]

LADY. Oh, I thought you'd probably have gone.

FAUN. No, no; I stayed behind.

LADY (*disappointedly*). I suppose it was foolish of me, but I did hope you'd go with them. I hoped you would do for Daphne what you . . . I mean, what the other faun . . . did for me.

FAUN (*drily*). Daphne seems to be . . . to be . . . er . . . getting there . . . er . . . on her own power.

LADY. But I should have thought you would want to go with them. You know, though, you're quite right. Our young people today do seem to have captured the very quality you have: (*Ecstatically.*) that lightness, that joy of life, that priceless classic poise, that . . .

FAUN (*delightedly*). Is that how I appear to you?

LADY. Why, of course. You know, since seeing you again, I mean, *really* seeing you, I feel positively renovated, no, I mean recreated, made over. You . . .

FAUN (*eagerly*). Go on!

LADY. But you don't want to listen to a middle-aged woman. You must long to be on the beach with the

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young people, piping and dancing, dancing on the sand, and singing in your lovely goat-like treble.

FAUN (*wincing visibly*). No, no; I assure you I would rather be here with you. (*Insinuatingly*.) Do you mind?

LADY. I? Mind? My dear Faun! I love it, of course, but I'm thinking of you. It seems a pity . . . Oh, I never could bear to think of anything young and beautiful, full of ecstasy, being chained and held against its will.

FAUN (*recovering his boastfulness*). Then you don't know fauns as well as you think you do. Nothing can chain us. *We* do as we like. (*Sinks suddenly to the grass*.) Shall . . . shall we sit down?

[*The Lady sits on the bench, with the Faun at her feet.*]

FAUN (*confidentially*). Just between you and me, I find I can't, can't . . . er . . . *take it* quite as I used to. There's something abominably exhausting about these modern young people.

LADY (*sighing*). Isn't there! (*Brightening loyally*.) But they *are* so fine, you know; so straightforward and frank and . . .

FAUN (*grimacing*). Quite! Undoubtedly! But I think I'll stay here with you. After all, the charms of a mature mind . . . (*Pulls out his pipes*.) With your permission.

LADY. Oh, certainly! *Do* smoke; I mean play your pipes. And I'll go on with my knitting. Oh, dear, this is too, too delightfully pagan!

[*Curtain, with the Faun piping and the Lady knitting placidly.*]

FIRE OF THE LORD
A Play of Religious Fanatics

By
FRANK DURHAM

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CAST

LORA, *a girl of seventeen (white).*

JIM, *a young farmer (white).*

JAKE, *Lora's father, a farmer (white).*

KEEBIE, *the preacher on Sunday, a farmer the rest of the week ("brass ankle").*

JONAH, *an old patriarch ("brass ankle").*

PUG
RUBY } *farmers ("brass ankles").*

ZEKE
SADIE } *farmers' wives ("brass ankles").*

LOU

HARBY, *Lora's grandfather who came from another section (white).*

SCENE. The yard of Jake's cabin in the "brass ankle" section of South Carolina, where the intermixture of white, Indian, and negro blood has created a race apart, having characteristics of all three. Here also live a few whites who, through association, are of practically the same mental make-up as the "brass ankles" with whom they are on an equality.

TIME. The present. Late afternoon in autumn.

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Dusk is just beginning to fall, and the light is gray and misty. On the right is the front of a rough board cabin with its small porch or "stoop." On the stoop is a rickety chair, a pile of stove wood, and back against the wall is an old lantern. The yard in front of the cabin is dry and dusty. The embers of a fire are glowing dully in the center near the front. Around the fire are several benches and boxes, and a black pot is to one side of it. At the back, scraggly clumps of bushes are silhouetted darkly against the sky, and to the left a large tree droops its branches. The shadows fade off into blackness beyond the tree.

Somewhere off in the woods an owl calls eerily. After a pause, two figures come slowly out of the darkness. They walk close together, arm in arm. We can only see their outlines in the dying light. They come to the fire and stop there.

LORA. Jim, there's a lantern on the stoop. (*Jim stumbles toward the porch. He runs against the step and curses under his breath.*) Oh, Jim, did you hurt yourself?

JIM. Naw, I just skint my leg. It ain't nothin'. Where's a match?

LORA. There's one by the lantern, in a box.

[*He finds the matches and strikes one. In the flash of light, we catch a glimpse of his face. He puts the match to the lantern, adjusts the wick, and the dim light diffuses through the scene.*]

Jim is a young fellow of about twenty, roughly dressed in a pair of old overalls and a blue shirt, both faded from many washings. His hair is uncombed, and a blue stubble

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darkens his cheeks. His eyes are blue and honest, and his face is strong, but there is about him a slowness of movement and of speech that makes him seem a trifle heavy and dull. He is fumbling.

Lora is seventeen, a strange mixture of child and woman. Her face is sensitive, but her chin is determined; she has a mind of her own. Her voice is low and rich, and her accent is not quite as earthy as Jim's. Lora wears a calico dress which fits her rather tightly. It is ragged at the hem, and falls scarcely below her knees. The outline of her young body is clearly defined. Her feet and legs are bare.

As Jim crosses to the fire with the lantern, she goes to a bench at the left and sits.

JIM. Don't you guess I'd better poke up the fire?

LORA. Yes, it gets mighty cold when the sun goes down.

[Jim puts a piece of wood on the fire and stirs among the embers. He is on his knees. He stops, looks at the poker in embarrassment, and speaks slowly.]

JIM. You know, Lora, I sure like walkin' home with you in the evenin'.

LORA (*bashfully*). I don't mind it so much myself, Jim.

JIM (*rising and coming to her*). I guess you know, Lora, how I feel 'bout you?

LORA. Yeah, Jim, I know.

JIM (*sitting by her*). You ain't like none of the rest of the girls 'round here. I don't know, but you . . . you just ain't. You're different.

LORA (*earnestly*). I don't feel like 'em, neither, Jim. I guess my ma comin' from 'way off somewhere musta made me thataway.

JIM. I guess so.

LORA (*turning to him and speaking softly*). Jim, ain't none of the other girls make you walk down by the creek like I do, is they?

JIM. Naw, Lora, I guess they ain't. (*He turns from her.*) The others always giggle and act like they

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thought you was tryin' to kiss 'em all the time. (*He turns back to her.*) You don't never act thataway.

LORA (*hopefully*). When we was by the creek this evenin' did you see all those lights jumpin' on the water?

JIM. Yeah.

LORA. You know what they are? (*He doesn't.*) They're stars that fell out of the sky when the moon is full!

JIM (*he is afraid she is making fun of him*). Aw, how you know that, Lora?

LORA (*conclusively*). Harby told me, and he knows lots of things.

JIM (*doubtfully*). He does know lots of things, but Lora . . .

LORA. Yeah?

JIM (*seriously*). You better not believe everything he says.

LORA (*on the defensive*). Why not?

JIM (*struggling*). Oh, I don't know. But some folks 'round here says Harby's sorta teched . . . the way he wanders off 'n' all.

LORA (*rising indignantly*). Well, don't you listen to them folks, Jim! Harby can throw 'way more in a spoon than them folks can bring in with a shovel!

JIM (*protesting*). I was just tellin' you what they said, Lora.

LORA. Well, Harby ain't teched! I know it. If it hadn't been for him I woulda left here a long time ago.

JIM (*taking a step toward the fire*). I know he's treated you good when he's here; but he ain't been here much, what with his wanderin' off somewheres every time he felt like it.

LORA (*she is hearing the stories again*). But when he comes back he tells me all sorta things he's seen, all about Columbia and the tall buildin's and the stores with big glass windows. (*To Jim.*) Oh, he goes lots of places and he tells me all about 'em!

JIM (*moving uneasily toward the fire*). Keebie and them

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don't like all them things he talks about. Don't none of 'em believe him much.

LORA (*turning on him fiercely*). Harby knows a lot more'n anybody 'round here! If Keebie and them knowed what they was a-doin' they'd pay him more mind and quit callin' on the Lawd so much!

JIM (*almost speechless at her blasphemy*). Lora, that ain't no way to talk!

LORA. If they'd try to do somethin' themselves instead of hollerin' and shoutin' at the Lawd! The Lawd ain't deaf. (*Softly.*) Sometimes I don't even say a word out loud, but I know He's listenin'. (*She sits quietly and looks into the fire. Jim looks dully at the ground. When Lora speaks, her voice is calm and matter of fact.*) Jim, that fire's goin' out. You better poke it agin.

[*Jim goes to the fire and kneels. Silently he prods about in the ashes for a moment. Then he speaks casually.*]

JIM. I wonder if Harby's comin' home tonight.

LORA. I guess he is. I ain't seen him since breakfast, but you can't never tell 'bout Harby.

JIM. Uh-huh (*He pokes slowly at the fire. His thoughts can almost be seen struggling to become articulate. Finally he makes up his mind, stops poking, and looks into the fire as he speaks.*) You know, sometimes I do wish I was sorta like him.

LORA (*enthusiastically*). It would be fine! Gettin' to know all sorta queer things.

JIM (*fumbling for words*). I, I been talkin' to him lately. He wants me to go to Clemson College. He says I could learn to do some real farmin' there.

LORA (*leaning toward him*). He told me 'bout that, too. I wisht you could! Harby says up at Clemson they know all sorts of ways of makin' things grow. (*Apprehensively.*) But I wouldn't say nothin' to Keebie 'bout it if I was you!

JIM. I ain't. Ol' Keebie'd say it was just another one

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of Harby's queer notions. You remember how he acted up when Harby told 'em they oughta dig a ditch from the river to the fields in the big drought if they wanted to save the crops.

[Coming toward her.]

LORA (*bitterly*). Yeah, Keebie said it was the will of God, I remember. And all the crops was burnt up! (*She turns away from him.*) Ol' Keebie makes me mad! He don't know nothin'!

JIM. But they all listen to him like he was the gospel; him bein' preacher'n' all.

LORA (*with defiance*). And what does he know? He ain't never been beyond Branson's Creek all his life! If they'd listen to Harby 'stead of him, we might have some crops sometimes.

JIM (*thoughtfully*). Yeah, and lots of 'em wouldn't be settin' up in the jail like they is now.

LORA. Harby told 'em they'd better quit makin' corn likker. He said the people up at Columbia had made some law agin it. He told 'em they'd all go to jail if they didn't quit.

JIM. But they wouldn't pay him no mind.

LORA. I guess they do now, after all them revenuers come down here.

JIM. That show made Keebie plenty mad. He ain't got over it yet. I heerd him say yesterday that he was a-goin' to *git* Harby.

LORA (*jumping up*). Oh, Jim! You guess that's why he's holdin' meetin' here tonight?

JIM (*calming her*). Aw, naw, I don't guess it is. They just goin' to pray 'bout the crops, I reckon.

LORA. I hope that's all. I don't want to see nothin' happen to Harby. He ain't strong like he used to be.

JIM (*crossing to the right*). He *is* gettin' old. He must be 'most a hundred.

LORA. Oh, he ain't that old. Him and my ma come here 'bout twenty year ago and she married Jake

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then. So Harby can't be more'n' 'bout seventy. But he ain't strong.

JIM. Naw, he couldn't stand no fight with Keebie.

LORA. Somehow, Harby's been more'n' just a grandpa to me. If it hadn't been for him, I sure wouldn't have known nothin'.

JIM (*angrily*). These folks here won't ever know nothin'. They don't want to. Ain't none of 'em farmin' any different from the way they did when the white folks first come here. How do they 'spect to make a livin'?

LORA. And that's why Harby wants you to go to Clemson College, ain't it? So you can come back and show 'em how to farm.

JIM (*bitterly*). But they wouldn't pay me no mind. Look how they laughed at Harby. (*He comes to Lora.*) And now Keebie's sayin' somebody's put a spell on the crops, and I believe he thinks it's Harby!

LORA. Lawd, I hope he don't make the others think so! Ain't no tellin' what they might do!

[*There is the crunch of footfalls on the sandy road nearby, and a rustling of the bushes.*]

JIM. I guess that's Keebie and them comin' to hold meetin'.

[*He goes disconsolately over to the bench right, and sits, looking glumly into the fire. A figure emerges from the shadows at the left. It is Jake, Lora's father. He comes surlily down to the fire without any greeting to the two already there, and rubs his hands over the dying blaze. Jake is a man of about fifty, rough and stolid, seeing the things only in front of his nose.*]

LORA. Oh, it's you, pa.

[*Jake looks at her sullenly and says nothing.*]

JIM. Good evenin', Jake.

JAKE. Keebie'n the rest'll be 'long in a minute. I left 'em at the cross-road.

LORA. Have you seen Harby this evenin'?

JAKE (*snarling*). Naw, but I'd sure like to! (*He*

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catches himself and changes his tone to one less vehement.) But I reckon he'll be 'long soon; he don't never stay 'way when it's time to eat, not Harby.

LORA (*rising*). I'd better go in and fix some supper, then.

JAKE. You can wait 'til after meetin'. Keebie'n' them'll be here soon.

LORA. Well, I'll go fix up a bite for Harby, anyway.

JAKE (*viciously*). Set back down! Harby can wait like the rest of us. Just 'cause he don't never come to meetin' ain't no reason for him to be expectin' no favors!

LORA. Oh, but pa, he'll be tired out and hungry after walkin' 'round all day.

JIM. He *is* gettin' sorta feeble, Jake.

JAKE (*to Lora*). Set down like I tol' you! Harby thinks he's too fine and mighty to come to Keebie's meetin's! I oughtn't to give him nothin' to eat! Him blaspheming the Lawd and never raisin' his hand to do a lick of work!

LORA. Aw, Harby don't mean nothin', pa. He just don't like Keebie, that's all. Ever since he found Keebie takin' the fish out of your trap, he ain't had no use for him.

JAKE (*almost shouting*). Keebie ain't never done that, do y' hear! He's the preacher! And Harby just made up that tale. Don't you let me catch you listenin' to him agin! Harby with his queer notions! (*Jake stops to listen. There is a sound of voices approaching through the shadows. One voice, a high rich whine, can be heard above the others.*) That's them, I guess.

JIM. Yeah, I can hear Keebie talkin'.

[*A group of bedraggled farmers and their wives emerge from the darkness. They are carrying lanterns. At their head is Keebie, a shriveled man with the bright, shifting eyes of a fanatic. He seems always to be lick-*

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ing his lips greedily, and his long bony fingers are never still, twining and intertwining. He looks at Jake and smiles.

JAKE (*cordially*). Howdy, Keebie, come on up to the fire.

[*Keebie hurries down to Jake with an air of mystery. He speaks to him in a low tone.*

KEEBIE. He come yet? (*Jake shakes his head to indicate the negative. Keebie looks disappointed for a moment, then he sees Lora and smiles unctuously. He goes over to her and begins pawing at her. Keebie can never keep his hands to himself when a young girl is around. He speaks in a whining voice.*) Good evenin', Lora. I'm mighty glad to see you this evenin'. 'Tain't often we have a girl as pert as you at meetin'.

LORA (*drawing away*). Good evenin', Keebie. (*To the others.*) Y'all set down if you can find a place.

[*Keebie slithers onto the bench near Lora. Jake comes over and pokes at the fire. The others, who have been standing back sheepishly, timidly find places, the women waiting until the men are safely seated. Jonah, a white haired patriarch, totters to the downstage end of a bench right, his white beard sopping up the brown tobacco juice that drools from the corners of his mouth. Two younger men, Ruby and Pug, seat themselves near Jonah, and Zeek stands uncomfortably behind the bench. Sadie and Lou, two haggard colorless women, creep furtively to their places. Sadie sits on the ground at the upstage end of the bench at the right, and Lou at the downstage end of the bench at the left. Jake stands at left center, and Jim is down right. Lora looks at the group with evident contempt.*

JAKE. Lora, you almost let the fire go out.

LORA. We poked it up when we come, Jim and me.

JAKE (*surlily*). Yeah, but it's near 'bout burnt itself out. Why didn't you git no wood?

JIM. I'll git some now.

FIRE OF THE LORD

LORA. It's on the stoop. (*Jim goes to the stoop. She speaks to Jake.*) What we havin' meetin' 'bout to-night? It ain't Sunday.

JAKE. I know it ain't.

KEEBIE (*mysteriously, to the group*). My ol' mare dropped dead today, right in the middle of the road!

JONAH (*moaning*). Somebody's put a spell on us, somebody's put a spell on us!

[*Jim comes down center to the fire, with the wood. He puts some on the blaze and leaves a stack near the fire. He rises and crosses to the right.*]

JAKE. Keebie's seen a horsetail plaited! The ol' mare's tail was full of knots!

[*The group looks apprehensively at each other and mutter under their breath.*]

JONAH. Devil's ridin' on the mare, devil's ridin' on the mare!

[*There are more mutterings and murmurs. Keebie rises with great dignity and comes to the center of the stage. He slowly raises his arms and looks up as though he were praying. A hush falls on the others. Keebie lets his arms fall slowly and takes a step downstage. He starts preaching in a kind of sing-song chant. As his voice becomes more and more rhythmical the people in the circle begin swaying in time. They murmur "Amen!" "Oh, Lord!" "That's right!" and other phrases while Keebie is talking. Gradually they join in a kind of chorus, a chant in regular rhythm. They raise their arms, and some of them pat their feet. As the chant becomes more and more intense, Pug, Ruby, and the two women fall on their knees. Lora watches the scene with disgust and, at first, so does Jim.*]

KEEBIE. I come to hol' this meetin' here tonight to ask the Lawd to look down on us agin. He's turned his face away. The crops is burnin' up! Our men is settin' in the jail! (*Telling this to the whole crowd, accenting it heavily.*) Our horses is a-droppin' dead

FIRE OF THE LORD

in the middle of the road! Oh, Lawd, I ask you what is wrong! Oh, Lawd, look down on us agin! We seek your blessin', Lawd!

THE CHANT BEGINS

KEEBIE. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!
Crops is bad, there ain't no crops!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

JAKE. The sun's just burnin' up the ground!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

SADIE (*a high soprano*).

I ain't seen money in two whole years!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

SADIE. My babies look like skin and bones!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

KEEBIE (*a loud wail*). Crops is bad! Crops is bad!

[*Jim begins to pat his feet in time to the chant. He mutters the words to himself.*

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

KEEBIE. The Lawd has turned his face away!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

KEEBIE. He ain't looked down! He ain't looked down!

Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

The law done taken all our men!

Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

The law done put 'em in the jail!

Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, look down!

The Lawd is mad!

[*He claps his hands and stamps his feet. The chant has grown faster and faster, reaching a terrific climax. Jim is now on his knees chanting with the others. They make each "Oh!" a long-drawn-out wail.*

KEEBIE. Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

LOU (*a deep contralto*). Oh, Keebie, tell the Lawd to look!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

Tell the Lawd to look agin!

Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

FIRE OF THE LORD

My Sam is rottin' in the jail!

Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

The law come down and took him off!

Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

In the jail, oh, Lawd! Oh, Lawd, look down!

Oh, Lawd, look down, look down, oh, Lawd!

[The whole crowd has been swaying and chanting and clapping their hands. They continue the chant for a few moments. Keebie, raising his arms and almost bending double, wanders around the clear space around the fire. Suddenly he stands erect and starts singing "Rock of Ages." The others join in. They sing it very fast and clap their hands in time.]

Rock of ages, cleft for me,

Let me hide myself in Thee.

Let the water and the blood

From Thy wounded side which flowed

Be of sin the double cure,

Save from wrath and make me pure.

[When the song is finished, the group murmurs and shouts unintelligibly. The last note has hardly died away, when another song is heard off at the left, coming nearer. It is Harby. His voice is full and he sings with spirit. Keebie stops dead in his tracks and listens. The others halt their murmuring abruptly. The air is tense. Lora looks up happily.]

HARBY (*off stage*). Oh, sister Phoebe, how happy were we

The night we sat under that juniper tree.

That juniper tree — eye-O

Put your hat on your head, keep your head warm.

Take a sweet kiss, it'll do you no harm.

It'll do you no harm — eye-O!

LORA (*rising*). It's Harby comin' home agin! It's Harby!

[Keebie gives Jake a furtive glance, and Jake nods his head. There is a feeling of tension.]

JAKE (*sullenly*). He's always comin' home agin!

FIRE OF THE LORD

LORA (*going to meet Harby*). Harby! Harby!

[*Harby comes into the light. He is a man of about seventy, erect, and with a firm step. He has a mane of white hair and there is a twinkle in his eye. From roaming in the open, his face is ruddy, and his cheeks are two bright spots of color. In spite of his rough clothes, he has a dignity that sets him apart from the others. He is alert and intelligent, laughing gently at the childlike minds around him.*

HARBY (*putting his hand on Lora's shoulder*). Lora, Lora, what's the matter?

Were you afraid I'd wandered off again,

Gone and left you all alone again?

LORA (*looking around at the others*). All alone? Why, Jake is here.

[*Harby sees Keebie and the others. He takes in the scene immediately. They look menacingly at him and several of them grumble. With a twinkle in his eye, Harby imitates the rhythmic chant of the meeting.*

HARBY. Jake is here. The moon is here.

The stars are hangin' in the sky,

And the wind is moanin' in the trees,

And the fish are slidin' in the creek,

But Harby's gone. And Lora's all alone,

All alone.

[*There are murmurs and uneasy stirrings in the group. In the background Keebie slithers from person to person, whispers in their ears and indicates Harby with his bony finger.*

JAKE (*interrupting*). Where you been all day?

HARBY (*walking to right center, and pretending to take him seriously*). Where've I been? Now, let me think . . .

LORA (*hoping for a tall story*). Tell me, Harby, where you've been today!

HARBY (*cutting his eye at Jake*). Oh, I've been lots of places, lots of places.

FIRE OF THE LORD

First, I met a buzzard on the road
When the sun was risin'.

[The crowd reacts at the word "buzzard."]

LORA. A buzzard?

[All are listening suspiciously.]

HARBY. Yes, a big black buzzard, standin' in the road.
And he was eatin' breakfast, right there in the dust,
Eatin' Keebie Gadsden's mare!

[An electric shock surges through the group. Keebie glares and clenches his fists. Others murmur. The tension heightens.]

HARBY (acting it out). I come walkin' up to him and
bowed

And sucked my teeth, and touched my hat.

LORA. You did?

[Jake looks at Keebie and shakes his head.]

HARBY. And the buzzard winked his red right eye
And said: "You knowed I was a-comin',
You knowed it all the time."
And I shook my head and said: "I did,
I knowed it all the time."

[Again the people stir. Whispers of "He knowed it!" etc. can be heard. Keebie looks at Jake, who nods menacingly in Harby's direction.]

LORA (believing in spite of herself). You knowed it all
the time?

How did you know it, Harby?

[Harby comes near her, and with an air of great mystery places a hand on her shoulder. He speaks in a hushed voice.]

HARBY. Last Friday I was settin' on the stoop,
And Keebie Gadsden trotted down the road
On that ol' mare of his'n.
Now it was Friday, mind you, Friday!
When the jaybird goes to ol' Nick in hell
And tells him all the sins he's seen that week.
Well, it was *Friday*, mind you, *Friday*!

FIRE OF THE LORD

But as I was settin' on the stoop
And Keebie come a-trottin', trottin'
Down the road on that ol' mare of his'n.
A jaybird started singin' on the limb.

[He suddenly points upward and all eyes follow his finger.]

LORA (*not believing*). Harby!

HARBY. A jaybird, blue as blue, I tell you,
A jaybird on a Friday!

And what do you think he was a-singin'?

LORA. Tell me, Harby, tell me what the jaybird was
a-singin'!

HARBY (*very mysteriously*). This is what that jaybird
sang! (*All eyes are glued on him, even Keebie's. Jonah's mouth is open and a brown trickle slides slowly down his chin. Suddenly Harby slaps his knee and laughs loudly.*) This is what that jaybird sang!
(*He breaks into a rollicking tune.*)

Ol' hoss, ol' hoss, you better be pickin' grass!

I thought I heard the buzzard say tomorrow'd be your
las'!

[All sink back in disappointment. Then they realize that they have been taken in, and their hostility comes out into the open. They growl threateningly among themselves. Lora laughs with Harby.]

LORA. Oh, Harby, I thought you was goin' to say something!

KEEBIE (*coming down to Jake mysteriously*). Jake, tell
your girl and her grandpa to step inside just a minute.
I want to talk to you.

JAKE. Lora, you and Harby quit your foolin' and go
see 'bout fixin' some supper.

LORA. But you tol' me . . .

JAKE (*violently*). Git out, both of you!

HARBY (*with mock politeness*). I think the Reverend
Keebie Gadsden's got somethin' to say he don't want us
to hear. Come on, Lora.

FIRE OF THE LORD

JAKE. Git on!

[Harby and Lora go into the cabin. Keebie and the others watch them tensely until they disappear. When they are gone, Keebie comes quickly down center and looks excitedly at the group.]

KEEBIE. Did y' hear that? You hear what he said?

PUG (*sullenly*). Yeah, we heerd it, all right.

[The others mutter among themselves.]

SADIE (*moaning*). It's the evil eye! Harby's done put the evil eye on us!

JONAH. I ain't never seen a decent man a-talkin' to a buzzard! (*His voice cracks.*) 'Cause buzzards do stink!

KEEBIE (*inciting them*). You heerd what he said about knowin' my mare was a-goin' to drop dead; you heerd it, didn't you?

RUBY. Yeah, Lawd, we heerd it right! We heerd it!

[His voice has taken on the old rhythm of the chant. The others moan. Keebie raises his arms heavenward and starts the chant again. The others are so attuned to his voice through long years of hearing it, that they quickly and almost automatically join in. Jim, too, joins them.]

KEEBIE. You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it!

He talks to jaybirds on a Friday!

You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it!

ALL. Yeah, Lawd, we heerd it right, yeah, Lawd!

KEEBIE. He puts his hand agin you, Lawd!

He tries to move the rivers from their beds!

You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it!

ALL. You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it!

KEEBIE. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, he puts us in the jail!

Oh, Lawd, right in the jail, oh, Lawd!

ALL. Oh, oh, right in the jail, oh, Lawd!

You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it, Lawd!

Oh, oh, Lawd! Oh, oh, Lawd!

You heerd it, Lawd, you heerd it, Lawd!

FIRE OF THE LORD

[They stamp their feet and clap their hands. Keebie leads them in a swinging chorus of: "Oh, Lawd! Oh, Lawd! You heerd it, Lawd! You heerd it, Lawd!" They repeat this faster and faster, clapping, stamping, waving their arms. Keebie prances up and down around the circle. When the peak is reached, Keebie suddenly stands erect. He raises one hand and speaks in a sepulchral tone.]

KEEBIE. Stop!

[There is a dead silence. All eye him breathlessly except Sadie. She is on her knees. Her eyes are glassy and she moans to herself and flutters her hands up and down, up and down in time to her weak "Oh, Lawd," etc.]

KEEBIE. The voice of the Lawd is a-goin' to speak!

I feel Him comin' close!

(With eyes raised and speaking in a full tone.)

Oh, Lawd, have mercy on your flock!

Oh, Lawd, come tell your lambs,

Come tell 'em how to find a way!

Oh, Lawd, your face is turned away!

(Frantically.)

The Devil's been a-walkin' 'round!

He's dragged his tail across the fields!

He's made his saddles in our horses' tails!

Oh, Lawd!

Ol' Devil come to earth agin!

Oh, Lawd!

[The group wails and moans, a dismal hubbub.]

JONAH *(an ominous wail)*. Evil eye! Evil eye! Oh, Keebie, tell Him 'bout the evil eye!

ALL. Yeah, tell Him 'bout the evil eye, the evil eye, oh, Lawd!

KEEBIE. Oh, Lawd, the evil eye!

Ol' Harby got the evil eye!

[The others take up the shout and call: "Evil eye, Harby's got the evil eye!" In the midst of this, Lora runs]

FIRE OF THE LORD

out of the cabin with Harby behind her. He is trying to pull her back.

LORA (*at center*). Stop, Keebie, stop! You don't know what you're talkin' 'bout!

HARBY. Hush, Lora! They won't pay you any attention! (*To the others.*) I tried to stop her.

KEEBIE (*to Jake*). Looks like your girl don't think like you do, Jake!

JAKE. I can't do nothin' with her. She listens to him all the time.

[*Indicating Harby. During this and the following scenes the group is chanting. Those who speak raise their voices above the chant.*]

LORA. None of you know what you're talkin' 'bout! Sure, I listen to Harby! He's the only one 'round here that's got any sense!

KEEBIE (*fiercely, putting his face in hers*). He's got too much sense, that's what's wrong! He's too smart! He's messin' in things it ain't fittin' for a man to fool with!

LORA. It ain't so! He's been tryin' to help you, that's all!

KEEBIE. My ol' mare dropped dead this mornin'!

JONAH. Harby put the evil eye on Keebie's mare!

RUBY. Yeah, you heerd him say the jaybird tol' him 'bout it.

LORA. Oh, Harby was just a-jokin' 'bout that. He likes to make up stories.

SADIE (*moaning*). Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

JONAH. Harby put the evil eye on Keebie's mare!

LORA (*frantic*). Listen to me! I ain't tryin' to fool you!

SADIE (*chanting*). Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

[*The others join in the chant and keep it up in low tones until the end of the play, the two women leading.*]

FIRE OF THE LORD

KEEBIE. And didn't he tell us all our men was goin' to jail, didn't he tell us that?

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

PUG. He tried to move the creek out'n its bed!

REFRAIN.

JONAH. Out'n its bed where God had put it, oh, Lawd!

REFRAIN.

KEEBIE. He knowed it all. He knowed it long afore it come to pass! Oh, Lawd!

[The refrain is getting stronger and stronger, faster and faster. The bodies of the chanters weave back and forth, their hands rising and falling. Keebie moves around among them, bending up and down. They completely ignore Harby and Keebie, who struggle to be heard over the refrain.]

LORA. Stop! Stop!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

HARBY. Hush, Lora, you can't do no good.

REFRAIN.

JAKE. He goes off and comes back and nobody knows where he's gone.

REFRAIN.

KEEBIE. And he comes back full of queer notions!

REFRAIN.

JAKE. He tries to meddle in our ways, oh, Lawd!

ALL. Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

KEEBIE (*waving his arms wildly*). What are we goin' to do, oh, Lawd, what are we goin' to do?

REFRAIN.

JONAH (*a high shrill cackle*). Fire, Keebie, fire! Fire'll cure the evil eye!

ALL. Fire, fire, oh, Lawd!

Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

LORA. No! No! You can't do that! You can't!

HARBY. Keebie, wait a minute!

KEEBIE (*wildly, ignoring him*). Fire, oh, Lawd, 'll cure the evil eye, oh, Lawd!

FIRE OF THE LORD

[All the others take up this new chant. Harby and Lora plead with them above the chant, but they are ignored. During the next scene Harby moves about the stage talking to each one, but to no avail. The chant grows wilder and wilder.]

HARBY. Listen to me, you idiots!

ALL. Fire, oh, Lawd, 'll cure the evil eye, oh, Lawd!

HARBY. I ain't never done anything to hurt you!

ALL. Fire, oh, Lawd, etc.

HARBY. I ain't got the evil eye

REFRAIN.

I was just tryin' to help you!

REFRAIN.

Help you, do you hear!

REFRAIN.

Sure I tried to make you turn the creek out'n its course.

REFRAIN.

The drought was burnin' up your crops.

REFRAIN.

And there was water in the creek.

REFRAIN.

Water, do you hear!

REFRAIN.

That ain't not devil's work!

REFRAIN.

LORA. Listen to him! Listen!

REFRAIN.

HARBY. And I told you not to make corn any more.

REFRAIN.

Just to keep you out of jail.

REFRAIN.

HARBY. I told you, but you wouldn't listen.

REFRAIN.

LORA. And tell 'em 'bout the mare, Harby!

REFRAIN.

HARBY. I didn't see no jaybird, I saw the mare

REFRAIN.

FIRE OF THE LORD

Lyin' dead right in the middle of the road this mornin'!

REFRAIN.

[The chant has reached a crescendo.]

KEEBIE (*clapping his hands*). Fire! Fire of the Lawd!

Oh, Lawd, we'll burn the evil eye, oh, Lawd!

JONAH (*cackling*). Fire! Ha! Fire!

[The chant continues.]

HARBY. Burnin' me won't do a might of good! It won't make your crops grow no better! It won't get your menfolk out of jail!

LORA. Harby! Harby!

HARBY (*defiant*). Evil eye! Ha! You think you got a heap of troubles now! You don't know what trouble is! You holler to the Lawd about the evil eye! But if you burn me, if you burn Harby, somethin' worse than evil eye'll come!

ALL. Fire, oh, Lawd, 'll cure the evil eye, oh, Lawd!

KEEBIE (*leading them on.*) Come, let's start the fire of the Lawd!

Come, let's start the fire of the Lawd!

[He beckons toward Harby; and Pug, Ruby, and Zeke take a step toward him threateningly. Harby is up center, Keebie is at his left and Lora at his right. Jim is down right. The women are chanting.]

LORA (*turning to Jim*). Jim! Jim! Help him!

HARBY. Get away, you fools! You'll get yourselves in trouble!

KEEBIE (*urging them on*). Git him, Pug, git him by the neck!

JAKE. I'll git him!

[Slowly they close in on Harby. Ruby grabs him by the arm.]

RUBY. Come on, here!

[Harby resists, and the others join in the struggle. They ad lib during the fight.]

KEEBIE. Grab his foot! He's kickin'!

FIRE OF THE LORD

[Jim starts toward Harby. Lora runs to him and tries to pull him back.]

LORA. Stop it! Jim, help him, he ain't got a chance!

[Jim shoves her aside and goes for Harby. She tries to pull him away again.]

LORA. Harby! Harby!

JAKE. Git away, Lora!

JIM *(knocking her to the ground)*. Git away, you little slut!

[She falls in a crumpled heap and moans to herself.]

KEEBIE *(running to the fire and getting a piece of wood)*.

I'll keep him quiet!

[He hits Harby on the head. Harby droops in their arms. Jim stands still, stunned; he looks at Lora where she is huddled on the floor. The women are chanting. Keebie waves the piece of wood in the air as he speaks.]

KEEBIE. Let's take him to the pasture! We can tie him to the ol' tree near the barn!

JAKE. There's plenty of wood down there!

JONAH *(cackling)*. Fire! Fire of the Lawd!

[Growling among themselves and shouting snatches of the chant, the men carry Harby off right. As they go, the chant can be dimly heard in the distance. This continues until the end. The two women, Sadie and Lou, are crouched on the ground. They chant feebly; their eyes are glassy, and spasmodic tremors jerk their bodies. Dazed, Jim stands and looks at Lora, who is crying softly. Suddenly he kneels beside her and lifts her up.]

JIM. Lora! Lora!

[She says nothing, but looks up at him with terror in her eyes.]

JIM. Are you hurt? My God, Lora, I musta been crazy!

LORA *(hysterically)*. Harby!

JIM. Lora, are you hurt?

LORA. Harby! They'll kill him!

FIRE OF THE LORD

JIM (*soothing her.*) Hush, now, Lora; there ain't nothin' we can do.

[*A red glare begins to come in through the trees. It flickers and wavers. Slowly it fills the scene. Jim stands, supporting Lora in his arms.*]

LORA (*stepping away from him toward center*). Now all of 'em will go to jail! All the neighborhood 'll be full of policemen, and they'll hunt us down with guns, and they'll shoot at us, and they won't be aimin' at our legs; they'll shoot to kill!

JIM (*coming to her*). Lora! Listen to me! Don't take on so!

LORA (*looking off left. She speaks in a low tone*). You see them red flames lickin' at the sky
And jumpin' in the wind like devils' tongues?

(*Sobbing.*) Harby! Harby!

(*She recovers herself and turns slowly to Jim.*)

Well, this ain't all; these flames ain't endin' nothin'.

They'll burn us all before they're through,

They'll burn us all!

JIM. Lora, don't!

LORA. They'll burn us all,

And Harby will be laughin' at us,

And he'll be laughin', too, when we are settin' in the jail,
Settin' there because we built a fire and burnt him up!

(*Sobbing again.*) Oh, Harby, Harby, you was right!
That fire ain't finished you.

(*Her voice is steadier and clearer.*)

You'll be comin' back agin

And you'll keep on a-comin' and a-comin',

Like the fire of the Lawd!

(*She sobs again and buries her head in Jim's breast.*)

Oh, Harby, Harby, you was right!

SADIE and LOU (*chanting*). Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd, you heerd it, oh, Lawd!

[*The chanting continues for a moment as*

The Curtain Falls

FLOOD CONTROL

By

MILWARD W. MARTIN

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CAST

BENITO BACIGALUPI, *an Italian youth.*

ANNA STRONG, *a well-born young woman.*

PETE KELLY.

MRS. JACKSON.

SLIM.

DONALD, *a child about six years old.*

SCENE. Interior of a one-room cabin, in a canyon in Arizona.

TIME. The present. Late afternoon.

FLOOD CONTROL

The cabin is rather sparsely furnished, containing a cot, several wooden chairs, and a wooden table. Left is the cabin door, which is open. Center is a window, also open. On a rack near the door are a saddle and bridle.

As the curtain rises, two people are on the stage.

Center, facing the audience and with her back towards the window, Anna Strong is sitting at the table, with a small portable typewriter before her. She is a well-born young woman of twenty-two, attractive, and dressed in riding clothes. As she typewrites, she occasionally consults a loose-leaf note-book on the table beside her.

Left, in the corner, almost behind the door, Benito Bacigalupi is seated on the floor, industriously repairing an old-fashioned telephone set. Benito is an Italian youth of twenty-two, vigorous and alert, and is dressed in blue overalls. On the floor beside him are numerous wire-repairing tools, from which he makes an occasional choice as he works.

For several moments after the curtain rises, the two continue to work in silence, Anna pounding her typewriter, Benito repairing the telephone.

BENITO (*cheerfully*). Your papa say for me to tell you you stay out here in the canyon too long, Miss Anna.

ANNA (*continuing to typewrite*). Yeah? Tell him I said "Pooh"!

BENITO. You say what?

ANNA. "Pooh"!

BENITO (*feeling carefree and conversational*). He say for you to come on back to town and keep house for him.

ANNA (*intent on what she is doing*). Tell him I'm only half way through my notes. I'll be back in a few days.

FLOOD CONTROL

BENITO (*smiling brightly*). He miss you, I think. He like to have you around the house. Every night when I wait on table at dinner I hear him talk about you to your mamma, every single night. Last night when he come home from business and find out your telephone gone dead, he worry all through dinner. He tell me five different times I must come out here today and fix up your telephone pronto. (*Anna examines her manuscript, paying no attention to him.*) Why you no do your type-writing at home, Miss Anna, instead of coming out here all by yourself in the canyon like this?

ANNA. Because at home somebody's always trying to talk to me while I'm working. (*She smiles at Benito in friendly fashion.*) It's getting the same way out here, now.

BENITO (*buoyantly; laughing*). Oh, you mean me! I always talk, Miss Anna; you know that! I just can't help it. I got to talk.

ANNA (*friendly*). Well, if you've got to talk, try lowering your voice; to a whisper, if you can.

BENITO. All my life I try to lower my voice. No can do.

ANNA (*busy on the manuscript*). Maybe you ought to be a singer, Benito; with a voice like that! An Italian opera singer!

BENITO. Oh, no! Not me! No opera singer for me! I'm going to be engineer, electrical engineer.

ANNA. I thought Italians always wanted to be opera singers. I didn't know they wanted to be electrical engineers.

BENITO. Oh, sure! Look at Signor Marconi! He invent the wireless when he is my age.

ANNA. That's true. I forgot about Marconi.

BENITO. Back in Italy my papa work for Signor Marconi.

ANNA (*interested for the first time*). Really? How interesting!

FLOOD CONTROL

BENITO. Si! He has worked for him for many years!

He takes care of the vineyards on his summer estate.

ANNA (*disappointed*). Oh!

BENITO. I lived on his estate until I was fourteen years old.

ANNA. Wouldn't he let you become an electrical engineer?

BENITO. I don't know. I never ask him. My uncle in San Francisco write my papa, and when I'm fourteen they send me to San Francisco where I work in my uncle's restaurant.

ANNA (*interested*). How did you happen to get to Arizona, Benito?

BENITO. Oh, last year I get sick of waiting on table. I hear about big flood-control dam being built here in Arizona, big Power Company going to run it. I say to myself, "If ever you going to be electrical engineer, now is time to begin!" So I just quit being waiter and come to Arizona to be electrical engineer. (*He laughs in a carefree way.*) And now I am in Arizona, waiting on table same as ever.

ANNA. Wouldn't the Power Company give you a job?

BENITO. Not an electrical job. They offered me a job pushing a wheelbarrow.

ANNA. Why didn't you take it? You should do anything to get started in work you really want to do.

BENITO (*shaking his head*). I figure out a better way, Miss Anna. I got friends in restaurant in town, and I hear from them your papa wants a man to wait on table in his home. Your papa, he is president of the Power Company. So I figure I go work in his home and make a big hit with him, and then I ask him for an electrical job with the company.

ANNA (*laughing*). It's a bright idea, anyway, Benito.

BENITO (*laughing*). Oh, I am full of bright ideas, Miss Anna.

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ANNA. Have you spoken to father about it yet?

BENITO. Yes, ma'am, once or twice. But I don't think he hear me. Your papa don't always listen when I talk to him, Miss Anna.

ANNA. He has an annoying habit, that way! Why didn't you speak to me about it?

BENITO. Ah, when do I get the chance? You work too hard, Miss Anna. Always you are busy, busy in your laboratory; busy over some book; busy at something. You work all the time, Miss Anna. Never before do I get a real chance to tell you.

ANNA. Father'll listen to you, all right. I'll speak to him about it as soon as I go back in town.

BENITO (*beaming*). Thank you, ma'am!

ANNA. You have a real urge in that direction, haven't you?

BENITO. Oh, yes, ma'am.

ANNA. Don't let anything stop you, Benito. It would be the unforgivable sin.

BENITO (*slightly puzzled*). Yes, ma'am. (*Anna turns to her manuscript. For several moments they both work in silence*). What you typewrite so much, Miss Anna?

ANNA. I'm writing a thesis.

BENITO. You going to sell it?

ANNA (*smiling*). No. I'm hoping it will sell me.

BENITO (*puzzled*). Yes, ma'am.

ANNA. If it's good enough, it may make me assistant to a great man.

BENITO. Oh!

ANNA (*gazing momentarily into space*). And then, who knows?

BENITO (*soberly*). Yes, ma'am. (*Again they are silent. After a few moments Benito holds the telephone receiver aloft triumphantly.*) There! She is fixed! Now we call up your mamma, to make sure. (*He hangs up the receiver, rings a bell on the side of the box; then picks*

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up the receiver and listens, beaming.) Hello! This is Benito, Mrs. Strong. Telephone all fixed now. (*He laughs.*) I fix it (*He snaps his fingers.*) just like that! You tell Mr. Strong what a fine electrician I am, hum? Thank you, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. She is right here.

ANNA (*taking the telephone*). Hello, mother! Yes, he fixed it in ten minutes. I believe he's a genius. In Italy he worked for Marconi, he tells me. (*She laughs.*) Well, no. I'm fine. How are you and father? Oh! I'm glad you're going! Give my love to auntie, won't you? (*She laughs with a slight annoyance.*) Oh, stop worrying about me, mother! Nothing can happen to me out here. The canyon's completely deserted. Oh, nonsense! No one ever comes in here. And even if they did, what of it? All right, dear. I'll be in in a couple of days. Good-bye.

[*As Anna is speaking over the telephone, Benito goes to the door and looks out at the sky. He thrusts his hand out, to see if it is raining, and shakes his head skeptically about the weather.*]

BENITO (*as Anna hangs up the telephone*). For three weeks now it rain and rain. Flood-control lake almost full now! Someday she overflow her dam and wash away your cabin, Miss Anna.

ANNA (*laughing*). No danger of that!

BENITO (*buoyantly*). Oh, no! Of course not! Big fine dam like that hold back *any* lake!

[*Benito begins pocketing the wire-repairing tools that are on the floor.*]

ANNA. There'll be no one at home tonight, Benito. Mother and father are driving out to the ranch for the night.

BENITO. So! Nobody home tonight, hum?

ANNA. Nope, nobody.

BENITO. Well, I hurry back to town, anyway. I got to see that horses all get fed.

ANNA (*smiling*). I have my horse out there in the shed!

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(*She points right.*) Why don't you feed him for me before you start back?

BENITO (*buoyantly*). Flap-Jack? No, ma'am! Not me, Miss Anna! He kill me!

ANNA (*laughing*). I didn't think you'd like to do that.

BENITO (*laughing light-heartedly*). No, ma'am! Not Flap-Jack! He the meanest horse in the whole United States, Miss Anna.

ANNA (*laughing*). He's not really mean, Benito.

BENITO. Oh, yes, he is, too, Miss Anna. 'Every time Flap-Jack look at me, he get mad and show his teeth. One time he get so mad he come out of his stall and chase me clear out of the stable. (*He laughs and shakes his head.*) Oh, he is mean, Miss Anna.

ANNA (*laughing*). He's not mean to me. I've been riding him three years.

BENITO. Yes, ma'am; but he is mean to me. He is mean to all the men around the stable. They all like to shoot him.

ANNA. I'm afraid Flap-Jack's a woman's horse. He just doesn't like men, and that's all there is to it.

BENITO. Yes, ma'am. *You* feed him, Miss Anna.

ANNA (*laughing*). All right, Benito, I'll feed him.

BENITO (*moving to the door*). All right, ma'am. Good-bye, Miss Anna.

ANNA. Good-bye, Benito. Thank you for fixing my 'phone. And I'll talk with father about your job as soon as I come in.

BENITO. Thank you, ma'am.

[*Exit Benito, left. He turns the corner of the cabin, outside, and passes the window center. Anna stands at the window and watches him.*]

ANNA (*smiling*). Don't let Flap-Jack bite you when you go in the shed there!

BENITO (*laughing*). No, ma'am! I get my horse out of that shed quick.

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[Benito can be heard, off stage right, as he opens the shed door and leads his horse out.]

BENITO (off stage). Whoa, boy! Come on out of this shed quick, before that Flap-Jack horse eat you up. Whoa, now!

[Benito can be heard mounting his horse, off stage right. Anna watches him from the window.]

BENITO. Good-bye, Miss Anna.

ANNA. Good-bye, Benito.

(Benito's horse can be heard receding in the distance, towards the right.)

Anna glances about the room, uncertain what to do. She lights a cigarette, toys idly with the typewriter keys for a moment, and then sits down at the machine, preparatory to writing. As she sits, she is facing the audience, with her back toward the window. For a few moments she leans back, smoking and pondering; then she energetically pulls herself together, mashes out her cigarette and begins working over her note-book.

Several moments pass, then through the window, to which Anna's back is turned, the shoulders and face of a young man of about twenty-six can be seen. He is dressed in city clothes, and is wearing a cap, but there is about him the unmistakable appearance of a farm laborer. His face is unintelligent but honest looking, and seems drawn and strained with worry. Through the window he sees Anna, and having satisfied himself that she is unaware of his presence, he cautiously scans the entire room to see if she is alone. Having reassured himself, he silently signals "O.K." to someone else, unseen to the left, towards the door of the cabin, and he himself withdraws to the right, towards the shed.

After a moment, a different man appears at the door. He is about forty, alert, unimaginative looking, and obviously not city-bred. He wears a cap, a flannel shirt, dark trousers, and needs a shave. He peers cautiously in,

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then makes a noise. Anna is thoroughly startled. The man enters quickly and glances around the room. His manner is alert and cautious, but not threatening. His name is Pete Kelly.)

ANNA (*startled and springing to her feet with a little scream*). Oh!

KELLY (*entering quickly*). Good evening!

ANNA (*still startled*). I didn't hear you come up.

KELLY. You was so quiet I thought the house was empty. (*He glances around.*) All by yourself, ain't you?

ANNA (*slowly regaining her composure*). Yes, I'm all alone. (*She smiles.*) I'm afraid you startled me.

KELLY (*unsmiling*). I didn't go to scare you. We smashed up our car down at the road.

ANNA. Was anyone hurt?

KELLY. Naw. We just busted an axle. (*He hesitates a moment.*) I'll bring the others in.

[*Kelly steps quickly outside. Anna, still somewhat amazed, stares after him. In a moment Kelly returns, bringing in a young woman of about twenty-three, who is leading a child of about six by the hand.*

The woman is beautiful in a hard, flashy, egotistical way, and is over-dressed in a very modish, tight-fitting dress. The child is well-dressed and seems worn and exhausted.

In the presence of the woman, Kelly's attitude is that of an alert, unimaginative person, ready to receive and carry out orders.

ANNA. How do you do! I'm Anna Strong.

MRS. JACKSON (*very self-confident; completely indifferent to Anna*). I'm Imogene Jackson.

ANNA. I'm sorry to hear you've had an accident. (*Mrs. Jackson ignores Anna's remark, and looks the cabin over contemptuously.*) Have you walked all the way up from the highway? (*Mrs. Jackson ignores her question as she looks around the room.*) It's all of three miles! You must be exhausted. Do sit down!

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MRS. JACKSON (*with a contemptuous shrug*). Beats camping in the canyon, anyway. (*She glances at the cot.*) I want to put Donald on the cot there. He must lie quiet and rest. Will you clear it off, please?

ANNA (*hurrying to the cot to remove a couple of books that are lying on it*). The poor child! He must be dead! There! (*Mrs. Jackson waits calmly while Anna clears off the cot.*) He should have food, a glass of tomato juice.

[*Anna hurries to the cupboard, produces a bottle of tomato juice, and begins pouring a glass for Donald. Mrs. Jackson picks Donald up, and puts him on the cot.*]
MRS. JACKSON (*to Donald; her tone slightly threatening*).

Now remember what I told you! You sit there and rest. Not one word!

ANNA (*handing her the glass of tomato juice*). This will do him good.

[*Mrs. Jackson takes the tomato juice without even looking at Anna, and hands it to Donald.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Donald*). Here, drink this! And no talking!

[*She stands over Donald as he drinks, her back turned towards Anna and Kelly.*]

ANNA (*to Kelly, who is still standing alertly by*). Won't you sit down?

[*Kelly, who has been watching Mrs. Jackson, glances quickly at Anna, then back at Mrs. Jackson. It is obvious that he is not at all afraid of Mrs. Jackson, but that his one idea is to be on his toes to do whatever she tells him to do. At Anna's invitation, he sits down tentatively on the edge of a chair.*]

ANNA (*offering him a cigarette*). Will you have a cigarette?

[*Kelly takes one silently, licks it with his tongue, produces a match which he lights with his thumb-nail, and inhales deeply, spitting out a tiny piece of tobacco as he exhales.*]

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ANNA (*to Kelly*). Is someone fixing your car?

KELLY. Er, well . . . er . . . !

MRS. JACKSON (*peremptorily; without even looking around*). Never mind, Kelly. I'll do the talking.

[*Kelly, unabashed, remains silent. Anna looks in some puzzlement from one to the other.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Donald*). Do you want a piece of bread and butter?

[*Donald nods an affirmative.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Anna; as though she expected to be obeyed*). Get me a piece of bread and butter, please.

ANNA. Why, of course!

[*She takes a loaf of bread from the cupboard and cuts a slice on the table.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Donald*). Do you want some jam on it?
(*Donald nods an affirmative. Mrs. Jackson speaks to Anna peremptorily.*) Put jam on it!

[*Anna gives her a puzzled look and spreads some jam on the bread. She replaces the bread in the cupboard, but leaves the knife on the table.*]

ANNA (*handing the bread to Mrs. Jackson*). There you are!

MRS. JACKSON (*handing it to Donald*). Here! This is all you're going to get now.

[*She takes Donald's empty glass and hands it to Anna, as one might hand it to a servant. Mrs. Jackson then produces a polished cigarette case and lighter from her pocketbook, lights a cigarette without offering one to Anna, and seats herself on the edge of the cot.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Just forget about our car. It'll be fixed all right. (*She inhales deeply from her cigarette.*)
What I want to learn from you is: how far is it to town from here?

ANNA. Twelve miles. But it's a long twelve miles, straight up the canyon.

[*She points right.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Is there a road?

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ANNA. No. The going's tough all the way. Just rocks and sand and perpendicular canyon walls.

MRS. JACKSON. What other way is there to go?

ANNA. You can walk three miles down the canyon to the highway (*She points left.*) where you came in. From there it's twenty-five miles into town by the road.

MRS. JACKSON. Isn't there any other way?

ANNA. No. There's no other way to get out of the canyon. You can't climb the walls; they're too steep.

MRS. JACKSON. If you walk up the canyon, can you see the town when you get to it, from the bottom of this narrow little canyon?

ANNA. Oh, yes. The Power Company's dam is there and a thirty-mile flood-control lake. You won't walk past the town.

[Mrs. Jackson sits in active thought, then drops her cigarette on the floor and steps on it, leaving the butt where it lies.]

ANNA (*irritated*). Don't do that, please. (*Anna picks up the cigarette, and puts it in an ash tray.*) It's my house, you know.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Kelly; ignoring Anna's remark*). Tell Slim to come in here.

[Kelly goes quickly to the window, whistles once, then beckons to someone outside to come in.]

ANNA (*startled*). Oh! Are there others with you?

[No one answers her. After a moment the young man first seen through the window appears at the door. His face wears an apprehensive, harassed look.]

MRS. JACKSON. Come on in!

ANNA (*to Slim*). Is anyone else out there?

SLIM (*startled and apprehensive*). I didn't see nobody else. Was you expecting somebody?

ANNA. Oh, no, I meant was anyone else with you out there?

SLIM. Naw.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Slim*). Come on in!

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[*Slim enters.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Anna*). Will you leave us for a few minutes, please? I want to discuss some private plans.

ANNA (*angry*). Of all the brass! Go outside yourself!

MRS. JACKSON (*looking at her steadily*). I'd rather you went.

[*At that moment a terrific clatter and pounding of boards is heard from the shed. Both men become instantly alert, Slim slipping his right hand into his coat pocket and keeping it there. The alert attitude is natural with Kelly, but it is obvious that Slim is under a strain.*]

SLIM (*to Anna*). What's that?

ANNA (*laughing*). That's my horse, Flap-Jack! It's past his feeding time and he wants his oats. He's the most uninhibited horse in Arizona. He'll keep that racket up till he gets what he wants. Listen! (*They listen silently, Kelly peering cautiously out of the window. In a moment Flap-Jack renews the racket vigorously. Anna laughs delightedly, and starts for the door.*) Don't you love him? He's like a crotchety old bear! I'll go give him his oats. (*She glances at Mrs. Jackson as she goes out.*) I don't need to tell you to make yourself at home.

[*Exit Anna.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*sharply to Kelly*). Go keep an eye on her!

[*Kelly, alert and rat-like, nods understandingly and exits after Anna. Mrs. Jackson, seated on the cot, looks Slim up and down scornfully. Slim, distraught, nervous and somewhat futile, starts to say something; then changes his mind and keeps quiet.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). Got the jitters again, huh?

SLIM (*unhappy and worried*). Naw.

MRS. JACKSON. You certainly look it! Been thinking some more?

SLIM (*conciliatory; almost pleading*). I been thinking some, sweetie.

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MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). Still scared, ain't you? Have I got to keep giving you fight talks every three hours?

SLIM. I ain't scared, sweetie. I just don't feel comfortable, somehow.

MRS. JACKSON. What's the matter with you?

SLIM. I ain't never done nothing like this before. I keep thinking maybe it ain't right.

MRS. JACKSON. My God! The Y. M. C. A. again!

SLIM. Anyhow, sweetie, what's it getting us?

MRS. JACKSON (*angrily*). It got you *me*, didn't it? I thought that was (*She mimics him.*) "everything you wanted in the world."

SLIM. It is! There ain't nothing else I want.

MRS. JACKSON (*angrily*). Well, there's something else I want.

SLIM. But we might not get anything, sweetie. If things went wrong, and we was caught, they'd lock us up for life. I never would have you any more at all. That's what I keep thinking I never would even see you again. It's too much to risk.

MRS. JACKSON. Things ain't going wrong.

SLIM. We can still back out. We can go on back to Hollywood and explain everything.

MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). And suppose we do! What'll we do then?

SLIM. We can get married and settle right there in Hollywood, just like we was.

MRS. JACKSON (*angrily*). And how'd we ever break into the money doing that?

SLIM. I had a steady job. So did you.

MRS. JACKSON (*working herself into a rage*). Are we going over that again? You want to be a dish-washer all your life, do you? Well, you won't live with me long if you do.

SLIM. I was making good pay, sweetie. I was saving money.

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MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). Twenty bucks a week in the Brown Derby Restaurant! Think I'd live with you on that, a woman with my looks and brains? I'm through with slaving. And I'm through with being nursemaid for other women's brats. Just because they got the breaks in the movies, and I didn't! (*She looks at Slim with angry contempt.*) You make me sick, saying, "It ain't right." (*She gets up from the cot and paces around in nervous restlessness.*) With all they've got, and them no better than me! No better looking and no better at acting! You make me sick. (*She glares at him.*) If you want to pull out, get going!

SLIM (*frightened*). I didn't mean *that*, sweetie. I didn't mean to pull out by myself. I meant for both of us to pull out, not just me.

MRS. JACKSON. Well, I'm not pulling out.

SLIM. I ain't neither, then; not without you.

[*He sits down on the edge of a chair, and looks at her; determined, yet obviously under a strain. Mrs. Jackson looks him over.*]

MRS. JACKSON. What good are you to me, if you can't do anything?

SLIM. I can. I can do anything you want me to do. You just name it; I'll do it.

MRS. JACKSON. Well, first: quit whining, or else leave!

SLIM (*desperate*). I can't . . . not leave you! I just can't! It don't make no difference what happens, I got to be where you are. Ever since I first seen you, that afternoon in the park, I . . .

[*Words fail him.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*lighting a cigarette*). And why do you think I finally let you pick me up in the park? Because you were so attractive? Don't you know I could get dozens of men better looking than you, and with more money to spend?

SLIM. I know you could, sweetie. A woman like you!

MRS. JACKSON (*angrily*). I let you pick me up because I

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thought if you were so nuts about me you'd help me some. I needed a man, and I thought maybe you were one. And now look how you act! (*Slim remains silent. She looks at him and relents slightly.*) The trouble with you is, you don't know life yet. You've only been off a ranch six months, and you've spent most of that time washing dishes and sleeping at the Y. M. C. A.! You never even had a girl before. It "wasn't right." I'm surprised you even learned to smoke cigarettes. Wait till we get to South America, wait till we fly down to Rio! I'll show you what life's like. And when this money runs out, we'll get some more. We're going to live, at least I am!

[*Slim, helpless in her grip, remains silent. Suddenly Donald begins to cry.*]

DONALD. I want my mother.

[*Mrs. Jackson, furious, rushes at him like an angry harpy.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*in a low, furious voice*). Shut up! If you open your mouth again, I'll tape it shut! Do you understand? (*Donald, terrified, merely whimpers.*) Do you want court-plaster over your mouth again? (*Donald shakes his head.*) Well, you keep quiet then. (*Donald is silenced. Mrs. Jackson turns to Slim.*) We've got to get word to Heinie, so's he'll know where we are. He may have closed the deal already, and just be waiting for us to deliver. (*They both glance at Donald.*) I want you to get right into town and get him on the telephone.

SLIM. I wonder how I get to town from here.

MRS. JACKSON. There are two ways to go. One is to walk three miles down the canyon (*She points left.*) to the road where we came in, and thumb a ride. The other is to go twelve miles up the canyon (*She points right.*) to the town itself.

[*She thinks a moment in silence. Slim waits, with set jaw, for orders.*]

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MRS. JACKSON. You better go up the canyon. It won't be safe for you to walk down to the road and thumb a ride. You couldn't explain how you got that far from town on foot. We're in all the papers by now, sure as Hell, and somebody that gave you a ride might be suspicious. You go up the canyon; it's safer.

SLIM. But it's twelve miles that way!

MRS. JACKSON. You don't have to walk it. You can ride this woman's horse.

SLIM (*his face relaxing in pleasant anticipation*). I ain't been on a horse in six months!

MRS. JACKSON. Don't ride him all the way into town. Somebody might recognize him.

[*Slim nods.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*smiling*). I'd like to see one of those front pages now, with my picture on it.

SLIM (*nervous*). Say! Maybe they got *my* picture, and somebody in town'll recognize me!

MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). Where in Hell would they get *your* picture? You ain't ever been photographed. All the studios've got *my* picture. (*At that moment the telephone rings. Both Slim and Mrs. Jackson are much startled.*) My God! A telephone!

SLIM (*starting towards it*). I'll bust it.

MRS. JACKSON (*sharply; seizing his arm*). Stop, you fool! If you break it, somebody'll come to fix it. (*She looks closely at the telephone.*) It looks like a private 'phone. We don't want to use it.

[*After a moment, Anna returns from the shed, followed by Kelly. At the door she knocks ostentatiously.*]

ANNA (*with exaggerated politeness*). May I come in now, or are you still discussing private matters?

MRS. JACKSON (*calmly*). You can come in now.

ANNA (*entering*). You're sure I won't be intruding? (*She gives Mrs. Jackson an amused, irritated look, which Mrs. Jackson completely ignores.*) The telephone rang, didn't it?

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MRS. JACKSON. No. It hasn't rung.

ANNA (*believing her*). I thought I heard it.

MRS. JACKSON. Is that a regular telephone?

ANNA. No. It's a private wire running to my home in town.

SLIM. I didn't see no wires outside.

ANNA. There isn't a regular telephone wire. There's only an insulated wire that runs up the canyon, most of the way on the ground. (*She turns suddenly to Mrs. Jackson.*) Say, I never thought! I can call up mother, and have her send a car around to the mouth of the canyon for you.

MRS. JACKSON. No, thank you.

ANNA. It'll be no trouble. And he can drive most of the way in here from the highway!

MRS. JACKSON (*with a tone of finality*). We don't want it.

ANNA (*puzzled; shrugging her shoulders*). All right.

MRS. JACKSON. We're taking your horse for a while.

ANNA (*startled*). You're what?

MRS. JACKSON (*to Slim; ignoring Anna*). Go ahead and saddle up!

[*Slim goes to the saddle rack, and begins picking up the saddle and bridle. Anna looks at them in amazement.*]

ANNA (*with mounting anger*). Let that saddle alone! And get out of my house, too, every one of you! I never heard of such a thing! You're the most offensive group of people I ever met! (*Slim hesitates, and looks at Mrs. Jackson.*) Let it alone, I tell you!

MRS. JACKSON (*calmly*). Go ahead and saddle up!

ANNA (*beside herself*). Why — ! (*She rushes at Slim and seizes the saddle.*) Let that saddle alone! And get out of here at once, do you hear me!

[*She jerks angrily at the saddle, but cannot get it away from Slim.*]

SLIM. Take it easy, Miss. I ain't going to hurt your horse.

ANNA. You're not going to take him! (*Suddenly she*

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drops the saddle, and rushes to the telephone.) I'll get you out of here!

MRS. JACKSON (*quickly*). Stop her, Kelly! Don't let her use that telephone!

[Kelly catches Anna's arm, and stops her just as she reaches the telephone.]

KELLY. Just a minute, lady!

ANNA (*furious and impotent*). Let go my arm! Take your hand off me! What do you mean!

[She swings at his face, but is helpless in his grip. Kelly takes hold of each arm, pushes her over to a chair and sits her in it.]

KELLY. Sit down, lady!

[Anna springs up, boiling with rage.]

ANNA. I'll . . . !

[She glances around for a weapon. Kelly pushes her into the chair again.]

KELLY (*sternly*). Sit down!

[Anna stares at him. For the first time, it dawns on her that these are not ordinary strangers. Startled, she looks from one to the other. At that moment the telephone rings. Anna makes no move to answer it.]

MRS. JACKSON. Who'll that be calling you up?

ANNA. It must be my mother. No one else can call on that telephone.

MRS. JACKSON. Let it ring. (*There is a moment's silence; then the 'phone rings again.*) Answer it, and say that a young married couple have dropped in here to get out of the rain. A young, married couple! Quickly! (*Anna goes to the telephone.*) If you say one wrong word Kelly'll choke you!

[Mrs. Jackson motions to Kelly, who takes his position beside Anna, with both hands at her throat.]

ANNA (*picking up the telephone*). Hello! Oh, hello, mother! I must have been outside feeding Flap-Jack when you rang. Well, give my love to auntie; and have

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a good time. And mother, I have callers. Can you imagine it! A Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. They had motor trouble down on the highway and came in here to get out of the rain.

MRS. JACKSON (*in a hoarse whisper*). Tell her our car's being fixed and we don't need any help.

ANNA (*into the telephone*). Their car's being fixed and they don't need any help. Yes.

MRS. JACKSON (*in a hoarse whisper*). Tell her if I should answer the telephone next time she calls, she mustn't be surprised.

ANNA (*into the telephone*). If she should answer the telephone next time you call, mother, you mustn't be surprised. I'm, I'm glad this eases your mind, dear. All right. Have a good time at the ranch! Good-bye! [Anna hangs up, and stands quickly away from Kelly.

She is obviously somewhat frightened.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Slim*). Go ahead and saddle up!

[Slim again assembles the riding equipment and picks it up.

ANNA (*suddenly*). Oh, who's going to ride that horse?

SLIM (*almost apologetic*). I'm going to ride him, Miss.

I won't hurt him none; I been riding all my life.

ANNA (*excited*). But you can't ride Flap-Jack! He won't let you ride him.

SLIM. I can ride any horse in the world, Miss.

ANNA (*more excited*). But really, you can't ride Flap-Jack! He'll kill you! He's an old circus horse, full of tricks, and he hates all men. He won't let a man ride him. He won't let many men even feed him. He was raised and trained by a circus woman, and he'll let any woman ride him. He'll let you (*She indicates Mrs. Jackson.*) ride him. But he won't let a man ride him. It's dangerous for you to try!

SLIM (*completely friendly*). Aw, I can ride him. I ain't had a good rattle with a pony in over six months.

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ANNA (*tense*). Really, you mustn't! It's suicide for you to ride him. He's a notorious horse.

SLIM (*more pleased than alarmed*). Aw, I can ride him. [*He picks up the riding equipment and starts for the door.*]

ANNA (*frantic; to Mrs. Jackson*). Don't let him do it! You ride him! Please!

MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). He can ride him.

[*At that moment Benito's voice can be heard, calling Anna from some fifty yards away, to the right.*]

BENITO (*off stage*). Oh, Miss Anna — a — a, Miss Anna — a — a!

[*All are startled. Slim drops the saddle, and puts his right hand in his coat pocket. Kelly produces a pistol, and looks cautiously out of the window.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Anna*). Who's that?

ANNA (*excited and frightened*). Oh, that's only Benito. He's the hired boy on our place in town. He won't bother you. Don't shoot, please! He isn't armed; I know he isn't. He came out today to fix the telephone.

MRS. JACKSON. Be quiet!

ANNA. But he isn't armed. I know he isn't! He . . . !

MRS. JACKSON (*fiercely*). Be quiet, damn it!

[*Slim gets out of sight behind the door. Kelly, his pistol ready but out of sight, stands where he can watch Benito through the window as he approaches. Anna clasps and unclasps her hands in silent agitation. Mrs. Jackson, seated on the couch, calmly lights a cigarette.*]

KELLY (*in a low voice, as he watches through the window*). He's all by his-self.

BENITO (*off stage; nearer*). Miss Anna! (*Benito is seen passing the window center, on his way to the door left. He is running. He arrives at the door somewhat out of breath.*) Miss Anna! (*He enters, sees the others, and stops politely.*) Oh! You got company! Excuse me, please!

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ANNA (*agitated but alert; speaking rapidly*). Hello, Benito! What's brought you back? You came out just to fix the telephone, and you started back to town half an hour ago!

BENITO (*buoyantly*). My horse, he sprain his ankle up the canyon. He walk now on three legs only. I come back to call up and say I be late getting to town.

ANNA. He didn't break his leg, did he?

BENITO. No ma'am, just his ankle he sprain.

ANNA (*tense; a little breathless*). Because if he'd broken his leg you'd have to shoot him, and you have no gun with you, have you?

BENITO (*surprised*). I? A gun? No, ma'am. (*He laughs.*) I never have a gun in my life.

ANNA. I knew you didn't have.

BENITO (*puzzled, but politely trying to conceal the fact*). No, ma'am. (*He hesitates a moment as the others silently look at him. Then he indicates the telephone.*) I call up now, and say I be late getting home?

ANNA (*nervous*). I, I don't think you'd better, Benito.

BENITO (*surprised*). No?

MRS. JACKSON (*from the cot*). No. (*Benito, startled, turns and stares at her.*) Keep your hands off that telephone! (*She turns to Kelly.*) See if he's got a gun! [*Kelly goes towards Benito. Slim comes out from behind the door.*]

SLIM (*who is behind Benito*). Put 'em up!

[*Benito, startled, whirls around. It is obvious that he is mad.*]

ANNA (*quickly*). They're both armed, Benito. Don't resist them, please.

[*Slowly Benito raises his hands above his head. As Slim keeps him covered, Kelly speedily looks him over for a gun.*]

KELLY (*feeling the tools in Benito's pockets*). What's this stuff?

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BENITO. Those are tools. I fix the telephone with them.

[*Kelly inspects them carefully, then completes his search.*]

KELLY. He ain't got no gun.

MRS. JACKSON (*from the cot*). Tie him up! He looks troublesome.

[*Kelly takes down a halter-shank from a peg on the wall. It is obvious that Benito is restraining himself with an effort.*]

ANNA. Don't resist them, Benito, please.

[*Kelly ties Benito's hands behind his back.*]

KELLY (*pointing to a chair*). Sit down there! (*Benito sits in the chair. With the loose ends of the rope, Kelly then ties Benito to the back of the chair.*) That'll hold him.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Benito*). They're expecting you in town tonight, ain't they?

BENITO (*unwilling to coöperate*). Maybe.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Anna*). Call up your family and say he's staying here tonight on account of rain. We don't want any searching parties out looking for him tonight.

ANNA (*nervous*). I think the family's gone out.

MRS. JACKSON (*sharply*). Call them and see! They were there ten minutes ago.

ANNA (*going to the telephone*). They were just leaving for the ranch then.

MRS. JACKSON (*to Benito*). If you make a noise while she's talking, Mister, I'll have you both shot.

[*Anna rings the bell on the side of the box, then picks up the receiver and listens. She repeats the process several times.*]

ANNA. There's no one there.

[*She looks at Mrs. Jackson, then hangs up.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Slim*). Go ahead and saddle up!

[*Slim again gathers up the riding equipment.*]

ANNA (*to Slim*). Please! Don't ride Flap-Jack! It's suicide, I tell you! You mustn't!

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BENITO (*pleased*). He going to ride Flap-Jack?

ANNA (*agitated*). Yes! He doesn't know what he's doing.

BENITO. Oh, Flap-Jack is all right. Let him ride him!

SLIM (*to Benito*). I can ride him all right.

BENITO (*buoyantly*). Sure, you can ride him. I ride him myself when Miss Anna is away.

[*Anna looks at Benito in amazement.*]

SLIM. If I just give him his head, he'll take me to town all right, won't he?

BENITO (*nodding; voluble*). So soon as you get on Flap-Jack, you just give him his head! A nice, free rein!

SLIM. Ain't no danger of his taking me *past* the town, is there?

BENITO. Oh, no, no, no. He will not take you past the town. No.

SLIM. How will I know when I get to the town?

BENITO. You need not worry about that at all.

SLIM. Can I see the town from the canyon?

BENITO. Oh, you cannot miss it. The Power Company's dam is there.

SLIM. What's that?

BENITO. A big dam, all the way across canyon! Canyon full of water from there on, flood control lake!

SLIM. Don't it ever overflow in rainy weather, and come washing down this way?

BENITO. Maybe you should watch out for that!

SLIM (*starting for the door*). There's been a lot of rain lately.

[*Slim exits left, with saddle and bridle, and goes past window center, to shed off stage right. For a few moments all are silent.*]

ANNA (*tense*). Really, he mustn't do this! Someone must stop him! He can't ride Flap-Jack!

MRS. JACKSON (*contemptuously*). He can ride him! He's been a cowboy all his life.

ANNA. But he can't ride Flap-Jack! He's a dangerous

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animal! Even the cowboys at the rodeo won't ride him!
He's notorious!

MRS. JACKSON (*looking suspiciously at Benito*). I thought you said *you* rode him.

BENITO (*volubly*). Si! Si! I ride him! Miss Anna do not know that! I only ride him when she is away. He is her horse.

[*Mrs. Jackson is unconvinced. Off stage Slim can be heard leading Flap-Jack out of the shed.*]

ANNA (*to Mrs. Jackson, growing more excited*). You ride him, please! He'll let a woman ride him.

SLIM (*off stage*). Whoa, boy! Steady, now!

ANNA (*agitated; going over to the window*). Something terrible is going to happen!

BENITO. He think up the idea himself!

ANNA. But I don't want him killed!

[*Anna stands at the window, tense, and watches Slim. Mrs. Jackson, her curiosity aroused, comes toward the window and stands behind Anna, watching. Kelly sits forward on the edge of his chair and also watches.*]

SLIM (*off stage*). Whoa, boy! Stand still, damn it! Open your mouth! Open your mouth, and take it! Open your mouth! There! That wasn't bad, was it? O.K., big boy. Let's get going now.

ANNA (*tense; almost to herself*). Oh! Don't mount him!

[*For a moment there is silence outside, as Slim mounts; then a terrific threshing noise. Those on stage watch in tense silence. In another moment there is a crash, and Slim yells in agony. Anna screams and rushes toward the door.*]

KELLY (*springing from his chair*). God, he's rolled on him!

[*Mrs. Jackson and Kelly rush out left, after Anna. Off stage Slim is groaning, and the others gather excitedly around him. From the confusion of voices only an occasional sentence is heard.*]

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ANNA. It's his leg! It's broken!

MRS. JACKSON (*in angry disgust*). Oh, my God!

SLIM. Don't! Don't! Don't touch it!

ANNA. We must get him into the house.

(On stage, Benito listens alertly for a moment, then hitches his chair up against the wall, where he can brace it. Throwing his full weight into his effort, he breaks the back of the chair and is free, except that his hands are still tied behind him. He steps quickly over to the table, backs up to it, and picks up the knife that Anna left there when she sliced the bread; then he goes to the window and peers cautiously out, watching the others.)

After a moment or two those off stage pick up the groaning Slim, and begin carrying him into the cabin. As they round the corner of the cabin left, Benito slips quickly out of the window center, and disappears right.

The others enter left, carrying Slim, who is in much pain. Anna, in tears of sympathy, has one knee; Mrs. Jackson, looking nervous and angry, has the other knee; and Kelly is holding him under both arms.)

ANNA (*comfortingly*). We can get a doctor in an hour.

You'll be all right soon.

[Donald, frightened, is standing beside the cot.]

MRS. JACKSON (*furiously; to Donald*). Get out of the way!

[Donald gets out of the way.]

ANNA. The doctor will set it soon. It won't take a broken leg long to mend. *(They place Slim, groaning, on the cot.)* We must cut his trouser leg open. I'll get a knife.

[She hurries to the table for the knife. Finding it gone, she notices for the first time that Benito is gone. She is startled, but remains silent. Mrs. Jackson looks at Slim in angry disgust. Kelly stands by for orders.]

MRS. JACKSON (*angry and contemptuous*). I thought at least you could ride.

SLIM (*in tears*). Oh, God, sweetie, don't! I'm sorry.

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[With a nervous gesture of contempt, Mrs. Jackson turns away from the cot. For the first time, she notices that Benito is gone. She screams in nervous excitement.

MRS. JACKSON (*screaming*). Oh! Where's that man?

(Kelly, startled, stares for an instant at the broken chair, then draws his gun and rushes towards the door.)

Kill him, Kelly! Kill him! Don't let him get away!

[Anna screams and tries to stop Kelly.]

ANNA. Don't! Don't! Benito won't hurt you.

MRS. JACKSON. Get him, Kelly!

[With a shove, Kelly sends Anna sprawling and dashes out of the door, gun in hand. Mrs. Jackson stops at the door. Anna picks herself up hurriedly.]

ANNA (*rushing up to the door*). Benito won't hurt you.

MRS. JACKSON (*agitated and furious*). I'll show him!

The little . . .

ANNA. Will he shoot him?

MRS. JACKSON. Yes. If he sees him, he will. And he's the best pistol shot in Arizona, too! *(She steps out of the door, and shouts to Kelly.)* Look down that way first, towards the road!

[Donald, frightened, begins to cry. He runs to Anna and buries his face in her dress.]

DONALD. I want my mother. I want my mother.

ANNA. Your mother hasn't run away. There she is, right out there. She'll come back.

DONALD. That's not my mother. I want my mother.

ANNA (*surprised*). Isn't that lady out there your mother?

DONALD. No. She used to be my nurse.

ANNA. Your nurse?

DONALD. Yes. She used to be.

ANNA. Isn't she still your nurse?

DONALD. No.

ANNA. Where do you live?

DONALD. In Hollywood.

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ANNA. Where are they taking you?

DONALD. I don't know. I want my mother.

ANNA (*to herself*). My God!

[*She puts her arm around Donald. Mrs. Jackson re-enters, very nervous, and in a towering rage.*]

ANNA. Whose child is this?

[*Mrs. Jackson, startled and furious, snatches Donald away from her.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Donald*). Didn't I tell you to keep your mouth shut? (*She slaps him.*) Didn't I tell you?

DONALD (*yelling*). I want my mother.

MRS. JACKSON. Shut up, I tell you! Sit there!

[*She thrusts him into a chair and glares at him.*]

ANNA (*aroused*). What are you people doing with this child?

MRS. JACKSON (*losing control of both her nerves and her temper*). None of your damned business! And you keep your mouth shut too, do you understand?

ANNA. Where's his mother?

MRS. JACKSON (*beside herself; screaming*). He's going to his mother, damn it! (*She paces the floor.*) His mother's no better than I am. Her father drives a truck in my home town. Yet she made me be her servant, the bossy little . . . Me! Made me eat in the kitchen, while she played around in society. All because she got a break in the movies and I didn't! (*Slim groans. She turns towards him.*) A swell mess you've got us into! I thought at least you could ride.

[*Slim merely groans and weeps.*]

ANNA. May I ride the horse down to the highway? I'll get a car to drive in here, and get him to a hospital.

MRS. JACKSON. No! Think I want any more people coming in here?

[*Slim groans. Anna gets a knife from the cupboard, and rips open his trouser leg up to the knee. Then, with a*

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pillow, she carefully adjusts the position of the leg, to make him as comfortable as possible. Mrs. Jackson ignores them and paces the floor in agitated thought.

ANNA. Is that any easier now?

SLIM (*groaning*). I guess so.

ANNA. When the doctor sets it, it'll stop hurting so much.

SLIM. I can't go to no doctor, Miss.

ANNA (*looking around*). Maybe we can set it. It's got to be set!

[*Enter Kelly.*

MRS. JACKSON. Didn't you see him?

KELLY. He ain't down towards the road. I went down far enough to see all the way, and he ain't there. He went up the canyon towards town.

MRS. JACKSON (*agitated*). Well, go after him! He mustn't escape!

[*Kelly stands near the door, and keeps a sharp look-out across the canyon, gun in hand.*

KELLY. He's up there hiding amongst them big boulders! If I go up there, he might slip past me and get to the road. He wouldn't have no trouble, dark as it's getting. I figure, if we keep him away from the road we got him bottled up.

MRS. JACKSON (*agitated*). How've we got him bottled up? He can go on into town.

KELLY. Not before morning, he can't! It's twelve miles, and his hands are tied, and it's getting dark.

MRS. JACKSON (*distract*). We got to get out of here! By morning he'll have this place surrounded.

[*She paces about in agitation. Kelly stands in the door and continues to look out. For several moments they are silent.*

MRS. JACKSON (*suddenly*). I want you to walk down to the road, Kelly! Stop the first car that comes along and make them drive in here! We gotta get out of this place.

KELLY. That wop might get his hands free and come back

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here. How're you going to handle him if I'm down there?

MRS. JACKSON. I'll use Slim's gun.

KELLY (*skeptically*). You know how to shoot it?

[*Mrs. Jackson thinks a moment, then suddenly turns to Anna.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*to Anna*). Will that horse of yours let me ride him?

ANNA. Yes.

MRS. JACKSON (*beginning feverishly to unhook her dress*).

Take off those riding clothes! I want them.

[*Anna, dumbfounded, hesitates.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Take them off; I want them!

ANNA. What are you going to do?

MRS. JACKSON. I'm riding down to the road myself.

ANNA (*angry and alarmed*). Ride in the clothes you have on!

MRS. JACKSON. They fit too tight. I couldn't even get into the saddle with this dress on.

[*Anna hesitates, glancing at Kelly. Kelly makes no move to retire; but brazenly watches her.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*her dress unhooked*). Come on, quick! Take them off!

ANNA. Right here?

MRS. JACKSON (*sharply*). Yes, right here!

[*Anna glances again at Kelly.*]

MRS. JACKSON (*angry*). Oh, don't be a ninny! Take those clothes off!

ANNA (*angry*). I'm damned if I will!

MRS. JACKSON (*furious, starting toward her*). Take those clothes off, I tell you!

[*Anna, angry and frightened, backs away from her. At that moment the telephone rings, long and repeatedly. Mrs. Jackson hesitates a moment, then goes to the telephone and picks up the receiver.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Hello! (*As she listens, there is audible*

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over the telephone the frantic voice of a man, screaming at the top of his lungs.) What? What? (Mrs. Jackson screams and drops the receiver hysterically.) It's your father! The dam . . . ! It's breaking! The lake is coming down on us!

[Anna springs quickly to the telephone.]

ANNA. Hello! *(Again can be heard the frantically screaming man's voice over the telephone. In the midst of a sentence the telephone goes dead.)* Hello! Hello! *(She drops the receiver; wildly excited.)* The lake's too full! The dam's bursting! The water'll be here in ten minutes, he says! We've got to get to the highway!

SLIM *(on one elbow, listening)*. Oh, God!

KELLY *(who has been listening intently)*. We can't run to that highway in ten minutes! It's three miles! *(He thinks for a second. The others stand, momentarily paralyzed.)* That horse can!

[Kelly starts for the door. Mrs. Jackson screamingly throws herself at him.]

MRS. JACKSON. You can't have that horse! You can't have him! Slim! Slim! Stop him! He's going to steal the horse!

[Kelly flings her aside. As he does so, Slim, leaning on one elbow, levels his gun at him.]

SLIM. Get back there! Get back there, or I'll kill you!

KELLY *(stopping short)*. I can't argue with a 45, can I?

[He grins disarmingly.]

MRS. JACKSON *(screaming at him)*. You devil, you!

[Suddenly Kelly drops to the floor, whips out his own gun and fires at Slim, wounding him in the right arm. Slim screams with pain, drops his gun to the floor and holds his arm. With cat-like swiftness, Kelly leaps to the fallen gun, opens it and throws the shells onto the floor, then flings the empty gun out of the window. Without a word, Kelly dashes out of the door and past the window toward the shed.]

On stage, Anna and Mrs. Jackson stand dazed; Slim

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groans in agony, both physical and mental; Donald, terrified, cowers silently against the wall.

Off stage, Kelly can be heard mounting Flap-Jack. Anna, tense, and Mrs. Jackson, weeping hysterically, watch him. There is a terrific threshing noise again, then a crash. Both women scream. Kelly yells throatily, and is silent.

SLIM (*yelling*). Did he roll on him? Did he roll on him?

ANNA. Yes.

SLIM (*yelling*). Ride the horse yourself, sweetie! Ride him!

MRS. JACKSON (*no longer able to think*). I can't mount him in this dress.

SLIM (*yelling*). Take off the dress and ride in your underwear! Carry the dress in your hands!

[For an instant Mrs. Jackson hesitates, then begins frantically pulling the dress off over her head. As the dress completely covers her head, Anna suddenly leaps upon her and pushes her over. She flounders on the floor, enmeshed in the dress.

ANNA (*turning and seizing Donald*). Come on! (*As Anna gets to the door, enter Benito, his hands free and holding the knife as a weapon.*) Quick, Benito! The dam has burst!

BENITO (*very alert*). No, no, no! Dam has not burst!

ANNA. Yes, father just telephoned!

BENITO. No! That was not your papa. That was me.

ANNA. You?

BENITO. Yes, ma'am! I tap the telephone wire a hundred yards up the canyon. I cannot call your family. Nobody home. So I call here. Did I scare you, Miss Anna?

Curtain

AMONG THE AUTHORS

WELDON STONE, author of the Ozark folk play, *A Darksome Furriner*, is with the department of English of The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. In 1928 his burlesque melodrama, "We Write a Play" won first prize in the Dallas Little Theatre's playwriting contest. In 1936 his "Quarrytown" won first prize in the Mid-western Folk Drama Tournament.

BOSWORTH CROCKER, author of *Coquine*, a scene from the life of the poet, Heinrich Heine, is the pen name for Mrs. Ludwig Lewisohn. She has had many plays published since 1917, and was dramatic critic for "Town Topics" in New York City from 1918 to 1925.

RONALD ELWY MITCHELL, author of the Welsh comedy, *Skinflint*, is a graduate of the Yale Department of Drama, where he was a Commonwealth Fund Fellow for two years.

DON C. JONES, author of the ghost thriller, *The Inn of Return*, is associated with the Metropolitan Comedy Players of Fargo, North Dakota.

ANN SEYMOUR received a prize award given by the Society of Southern Women for The Prevention of Lynching for her negro lynching drama, *Lared, Does You Undahstan'*. The play was first produced at Payne College, Augusta, Georgia.

ESTHER SAGALYN, author of the comedy of movie manners and morals, *Only the Birds*, is a student at Yale, where her play has been produced in the Yale Theatre.

BARBARA BUSSE, author of the character study, *The Front Door*, is with the Chicago office of Harcourt, Brace, and Co. This play was awarded the gold trophy cup in the 1934 Midwest Fold Playwriting Contest; it was awarded honorable mention in the 1934 Dramatic Arts

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Contest of Columbia College, Missouri; and first Phi Theta Kappa prize.

ELOISE EUBANK and WILLIAM SHAPARD, authors of the Republic of Texas farce, *The Count and the Pig*, have both been active in work with the Dallas Little Theatre, Texas, and have written several one-act plays. *The Count and the Pig* was first produced by the Dallas Chapter of Zeta Phi Eta, national speech fraternity.

JACK W. LEWIS, author of the gold-mine drama, *Shooting Star*, is a graduate of the University of Colorado, where this play was first produced.

WALTER ROBB, author of *An Evening Reverie of Philippine Peasants*, is a graduate of the University of the Philippines, where this play was first produced.

GERTRUDE ALLEN, author of the adoption quadrangle, *A Paternity Case*, has written a number of plays, three of which, "The Grass is Always Greener," "Homespun," and "A Bone for Mother Hubbard," were among the winners in the Massachusetts State Play Contests of 1934, 1935, and 1936.

VIRGIL L. BAKER, author of the Arkansas tragedy, *Ol' Captain*, has had several of his plays, including this one, produced at the University of Arkansas, where he is a member of the faculty. At present he is on leave of absence at the University of Iowa, where he is Associate Editor of the University of Iowa quarterly, "Western Theatre."

HAROLD CALLEN, author of the zoölogical satire, *Monkey House*, is a New Yorker who has done everything from ditch-digging to play-reading. This play was first produced by the Actors' Repertory Theatre of New York, as a benefit performance for the Teachers' Union.

ARLEEN THYSON, author of the comedy of college thespians, *Sweet 16*, found the thesis for this play through her personal experiences in the playwriting tournaments conducted annually at Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

GORDON DALINE, author of the hobo tragedy, *Box Car*

AMONG THE AUTHORS

Heading West, is a student at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, where this play was first produced; but he rode the freights to the Dakota wheat-fields for "copy" for this drama. The play was chosen by John Sherman, dramatic and music critic of the Minneapolis Star, for first prize in the annual Little Theatre playwriting contest of 1936. It has an all-male cast.

ELISE WEST QUARF, author of the cosmetic comedy, *Everybody's Doing It*, has had a number of plays published and produced. Her works are especially popular with women's clubs. This one has an all-female cast.

SADA COWAN, author of the Nazi drama, *Auf Wiedersehen*, has been writing short and long stage and screen plays since 1917, and for the last ten years has resided in Hollywood.

DELIA VANDEUSEN, author of *Tea-Time for Shelley's Faun*, is a newcomer to the playwriting field. Judging from this play, we may say that Miss VanDeusen gives evidence of ability to proceed — let us borrow a phrase from the faun — "on her own power."

FRANK DURHAM, author of the folk spiritual, *Fire of the Lord*, holds a Rockefeller Fellowship in Playwriting at the University of North Carolina, where this play was first produced.

MILWARD W. MARTIN, author of the kidnapping melodrama, *Flood Control*, is a student at the Dramatic School of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, where this play was first produced.

Finis



